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CHRISTIAN COURIER

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Yeast changes everything .....p. 12

58th year of publication

The "New" Reformed Ecumenical Council

Richard L. van Houten

This year is the 57th year of the Reformed Ecumenical Council. We have been a "Council" for 15 years, but many people still think of us as the "RES," the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. By reputation, the old REC had a lot of infighting. I am afraid we had an image of a bunch of gnarly old white men, constantly bickering to prove who had the purest views of Scripture and the Reformed confessions.

The image contains some truth, and at least an equal amount of distortion. Much of the bickering was honest disagreement over issues that the churches felt were profound, such as, the integrity of Scripture, racism and apartheid, or compromising oneself for sake of a surface unity.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF R.VANHOUTEN

Participants in the peace process,in Nigeria, Joseph Kukewen, Richard vanHouten, two local chiefs and Peter Vander Meulen, CRCNA Coordinator for Social Justice and Hunger Action

Today's REC is a different kind of animal. Near the entrance to our office I keep a picture of participants at our last assembly. When visitors enter and stop, I point it out and ask if they can find themselves in that picture, that is, someone who is like them. And they usually can. They find young and old, they find black, white, and Asian faces, and they see men and women. Of course, the proportions are not always what we hope for, but they are there, quite unlike assemblies of two or three decades ago.

Consider these few changes:

- Today, the REC unites 39 Reformed and Presbyterian denominations under its umbrella. Of these, 75% are what we would call third-world churches. The old RES was around for 17 years before it had its first third-world member.

- When the RES became REC in 1988, it had about five million Christians belonging to its member denominations. This dropped lower until our last big battle ended in 1992. Now, ten years later, **ten million** believers belong to our members. About 85% of those people are in the third world.

- The President of the REC is an Indonesian, Dr. Kadarmanto Hardjowasito.

- Two decades ago, member church contributions, or assessments, paid for 90% of the RES expenses. Today, with all the third-world members who have joined, member contributions are less in raw dollars than 15 years ago, and provide about half the income for

*see **REC** page 2...*

Pilgrimage by tractor: Grand Rapids, Michigan to Alton, Iowa

Phil de Haan

It's about 650 miles from Grand Rapids, Michigan to Alton, Iowa if you take the scenic route.

Calvin chaplain Dale Cooper plans to make the trip this summer. He'll leave July 23 and head north from Grand Rapids about 100 miles to Ludington, Mich., where he'll take a four-hour ferry ride across Lake Michigan on the S.S. Badger to Manitowoc, Wis. From there it's about 550 miles due west from Manitowoc to Alton.

Cooper figures he'll get from Grand Rapids to Alton in about a week, averaging 10 to 12 miles per hour and driving 10 to 12 hours a day.

It seems slow, he admits, but it's about the best he can expect from his vehicle of choice: a 1941 John Deere B tractor.

Religious act

Yep, Cooper, who in the past has bicycled from Vancouver to Mexico and run the Chicago Marathon, has a new challenge in his sights: a midwest tractor ride. Which, of course, begs the simple question: why?

The affable chaplain is eager to explain his seemingly quixotic quest, noting that the trip will operate on two distinct yet related levels.

"First," he says, "I expect that this trip will be enormously fun. I've always maintained that a two-cylinder John Deere produces a sound than which none greater can be imagined. So to be on that green machine for an entire week, to hear its putt-putt-putt, to feel the snap of the breeze and the warmth of the Iowa sun, to slow (my) life down for a while – that's going to be a delight in itself."

But there's a deeper purpose to the trip too.

"It's got something of a sacramental quality to it," says Cooper. "Taken by itself, of course, a ride on a tractor, even a vintage John Deere tractor, is something perfectly ordinary. But for me the 'why' of the trip is connected with where I've been in life and what, deep-down, I want to affirm. I intend my trip to be religious act, if you will."

Giant of a man

For Cooper the religiousness of the ride rests in his relationship with his father, John Cooper, who died 17 months ago, on Christmas eve.

"My Dad was an ordinary little fellow," he recalls. "At 5'5 he wasn't very tall. He wasn't all that famous. He never made a lot of money, held a lot of power, wrote influential books or gave memorable speeches. He reached only

Calvin chaplin Dale Cooper and the tractor

PHOTO COURTESY OF DUKE ROBINSON

*see **Tractor** page 3...*

News

The REC knits together Reformed churches. . .

...continued from page 1

the REC. Ministry or service to our members has grown.

Ministry visits

Our membership has many people from well-organized and affluent churches. They run good agencies and institutions, they pay their staff, they support others – churches like the Christian Reformed Church of North America. We also have some others.

Imagine yourself working in the offices of some of our churches. You might have a seven-year-old computer, but the electricity is intermittent. You probably have a telephone access, which is almost universal. Still, the headquarters of some denominations cannot be reached by telephone. You may have an email address now, but might have to travel an hour or two to get to a nearby town where you have access to your yahoo or hotmail account. The church probably provides housing for you, perhaps even a sturdy block building with plastered walls and 3-4 rooms. They pay you about $100 a month, from which you must pay school fees, buy some food and clothing, and support your mother and three children from your brother, who has no job. Even that $100 may be twice what a local rural congregation pays its pastor. You survive; you probably have a television and a refrigerator, but no car. Most likely the church office has a car, which runs 8-9 months every year.

Some of our members are in hostile or unstable environments. Think of the financial collapse and the interethnic and interreligious strife in Indonesia. The REC has six member churches scattered across that country. Consider Zimbabwe, where first violence and then triple-digit inflation have made life difficult. Three of our members have a presence there. Or Greece, where our member faces stern opposition from the Greek Orthodox Church. And maybe we should even mention France and The Netherlands, where post-Christian secularism is sucking the life from the churches.

So why are churches like these in the REC? What do we do for them? After all, we have no funding programs to help lift them into a better life. But we visit them, we recognize them, we know their names. We encourage them in their ministries, we console them in their sorrows, we communicate their situation to others in the REC family. We create a place – our assemblies – where they can relate to other Christian leaders who have the same commitments to Scripture and the Reformed confessions. It is a ministry of hope.

I sit in a modest office in Grand Rapids, and our six staff members are only equivalent to about four full-time workers. Yet, when I, or one of our Executive Committee members, visit one of our members at home, on their turf, the effect is remarkable. It is a sign

PHOTO COURTESY OF R. VANHOUTEN

Jim Lont, with youth leaders l.to r. Margaet Kimosop & Thomas Togom (Kenya), friend, Art Ophoff, Jim, Demetris Boukis (Greece), Llyod Ng'ambi (Zambia).

for them that believers in 25 other countries will know them, recognize them and pray for them. They see their own stories in our monthly *News Exchange*, a communication that is both ministry and reporting.

We have a goal of visiting every member at least once between our assemblies, or about every four or five years. To meet the goal we send our staff and executive committee members out to see, to report, and to encourage and advise.

I think this function has been important in the REC/RES for a long time, but was often overshadowed by other concerns. In my view, the role of encourager, consoler and communicator is one of the best things we do. It is the role that comes closest to making the REC to be *Church* in the New Testament sense of the word.

We now summarize that role with this sentence:

*The REC **knits** together **confessionally Reformed churches**, and **serves** them with **love and care** across culture.*

Leadership Development

I have a friend who says when he hears the words "leadership development," he knows that fluff is coming next. He knows that many organizations claim to be doing something about leadership development. Like so much that is said in management theory – my search on Amazon.com produced 32,000 results – it is difficult to identify just what is being done in leadership development, and a host of parachurch organizations claim to be doing it.

Perhaps because of the currency of the term, our executive committee began using it to identify challenges they saw on their visits to our members. So, in our assembly in 2000, we spent two days with papers, workshops and other group processes to come up with some strategies for leadership development. We identified seven areas where churches needed to learn and to help one another. I think the important ones are three: selection (or calling), training and stewardship.

At bottom, of course, these are not just technical or managerial problems, but spiritual problems. In selection, how does a church choose the right person? It needs to look at what it means by calling. Whom does the Lord want? How do we know that? In training, we ask what is the most appropriate or the most needed? Does a church look at home or abroad for training? Does the church pay attention to the training needs of the lay people who are its members, or only the more glamorous advanced degrees for theology professors, people chosen by an elite already at the top? Stewardship is about where resources are found, and how we manage them. Does God call people to be his followers and then not give them the resources to do his mission? And where are those resources? Are the people of the local churches giving? Is the whole world Church directing its resources to the places where they are most needed? Who should share with whom, and what should they share? Showering money on a poor group creates dependency, but withholding funds from those in need is selfish. Is it spiritual wisdom for a third-world leader to seek funds constantly in Europe or North America?

So what can the REC do about these questions? First, we do what we can do best: create a place where our members can talk to one another about the issues that concern them. That was the kind of response we found in our assembly in 2000, and another such conversation will take place at our next assembly in 2005. In 2004, I am trying to arrange three regional consultations, what we call our Review and Renew consultations, on stewardship. We are asking the churches to send people who have stories of what has worked for them. How can they put together the resources they need to carry out God's mission?

Secondly, we have one program of aid, our Library and Textbook Program. This is an older program, started in 1989. We started because many of our younger, emerging churches were starting schools. They found land, built buildings, got a few pastors with Masters degrees to teach, and recruited students. For study resources, however, they made few plans, and often made do with gifts from a missionary's library. So we started to meet that need, first by helping them with the selection and ordering process for new books, and later providing books at the cost of shipping, books of their choice. For new books, we have substantial discounts. Finally, this is one program where we began to raise funds. After a few years, Calvin Theological Seminary, which has a specified synod grant for helping churches abroad, devoted part of those funds to our program every year. Last year we ran about $95,000 through the program, most of that being the money of the 26 program schools or one of their mission partners. Few organizations have library development programs, so we play a small but unique role here.

Of course, books alone do not produce education. Another challenge lies in the slow working toward a new style of learning, resource-based education. Many, but not all, of the schools in our program still use a rote style of learning. The professor lectures, passing on information, the students copy, the students memorize their notes and write exams. Very few learn by opening the books and finding an answer on their own.

Thirdly, we are building a network of relations with schools and

PHOTO COURTESY OF R. VANHOUTEN

Executive Committee members talking with Dr. A. Kabanaga

Politics

. . . and serves them with love and care

with church leaders. Our role is to encourage sound planning and selection by the church leaders. We have good access and trust with the church officials, and are often in a position to see the process of choosing people for advanced study. When that is a good process, we can help schools that are looking at student applications in their selection. We always describe the REC as an ecclesiastical organization. Therefore, our work is with the churches, and we resist getting into scholarship programs. We believe schools are best qualified to make those judgments, and to raise the necessary funding. Our emphasis is that a student whom his or her church has chosen and set aside for a special task when finished is much more likely to have a sense of calling, and is thus more likely to return home to take up her or his task.

A specialty in Youth and Christian Nurture

Since 1996, Rev. Jim Lont has been working with us as a staff member – in his retirement. Building on his volunteer work for the REC since 1980, Jim has built up a ministry for Youth and Christian Nurture. He works mainly with the denominational youth and education leaders in our members. He has encouraged many struggling leaders, and facilitated many conferences and consultations for them. He has stimulated interest in Christian schools in many places. And he has helped the REC build a special partnership with the Reformed Bible College in Grand Rapids to have a one-year practical training program for selected denominational youth leaders.

Jim is not a young man, but he gets out and meets people. I can hardly count the times the people he works with have told me how much he helps them, by showing that he understands and cares.

The REC as an Arena for Relationships

A half-century ago, the REC was one of several ecumenical organizations that sprang into being following World War II. We share beginning times with the World Council of Churches, and the Lutheran World Federation. It was a time of strong, centrally managed churches, who made strong organizational commitments to these international communions.

Today we live in a world that has passed this by. Whether we describe ourselves as post-modern or post-industrial, the fact is that we care mostly about the people we know, both near and far. Structurally, churches have decentralized and globalized simultaneously.

With that reality in mind, I try to emphasize that the REC is an arena where we can build relationships. We can be effective both in the first world, where the value of relationships has risen in recent decades, and in the third world, where the value of relationships was never lost.

So we will not run large programs with a big staff, but we will create spaces. We will encourage relationships within them, and ministry will happen.

Advocacy

Standing up for our members who suffer has always had some role in the REC. We protested often against apartheid, and we organized small relief efforts throughout the last two decades.

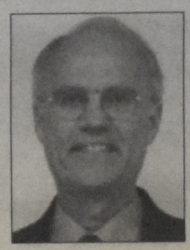
More recently, we have joined in protests about unrest and violence in Indonesia several times. I have signed some letters addressed to rulers in the middle east, though we have no members there. It may be a corollary of relationships that we lift our voice for those who suffer.

One lengthier project has been the peace process in Nigeria. Since the year 2000, we have helped coordinate, with the Social Justice and Hunger Action office of the Christian Reformed Church, a peace process for a conflict in which three of our member churches became involved. I think this church-initiated process has come a long way. Readers of the *Christian Courier* may have seen a recent report of a unity celebration between two of those churches, the Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria and the Reformed Churches of Christ in Nigeria. That would not have happened without the work on peace.

I should not exaggerate that role, of course. We are a small organization on the world scene, and the UN Secretary General never replies to my letters. Yet, it is a change.

More information

You should know that we have much of our information and publications on our web site, www.recweb.org. From our secretariat we publish a monthly newsletter about our members and news of other world churches. This is available without charge in either paper or electronic form. We publish a quarterly journal, the *REC Focus*, which contains the working analyses of our four commissions. Let us know if you want to know more.



Richard van Houten is the general secretary of the REC, only the second one in its history. Paul Schrotenboer was the first.

Tractor

. . .continued from page 1

the eighth grade. But in my book he was a giant of a man. He left a lasting impact on me and I want to honor his memory."

The events of November 1, 1945 shaped John Cooper's legacy.

That day Marjorie Cooper (John's wife and Dale's mom) became ill with polio. Paralyzed from the neck down at just 26 years of age, she lived the rest of her life, nearly 40 years, in an iron lung. During those four decades, John Cooper remained faithfully at his wife's side. He was her full-time nurse and caretaker – feeding and bathing her, brushing her teeth, rubbing her back to prevent bedsores.

"And my Dad did it all so uncomplainingly," says Cooper, who was three when his mom got sick. "He gave not even a hint that he thought life had cheated him, or given him a raw deal. On the contrary, he was life-affirming and so full of joy. Without ever saying so, he considered caring for my Mom a sacred vocation, something God had called him to do."

When Marjorie died on August 29, 1985, Cooper remembers that his dad tried his best to alleviate her breathing distress, but nothing helped.

"Mom took her last shallow breath," he says, "and then died. I shut the lung off – the first time in 40 years. For a brief few moments, the room was deathly quiet. Then my Dad punctuated the silence. With eloquent simplicity he spoke words I shall never forget: 'Margie was a wonderful wife.'"

Those simple words, says Cooper, are why he's doing this summer's tractor ride. He calls his dad's wonderful eulogy "the charter of my Dad's entire life." And he wants to pay homage to that charter this summer.

But why the tractor?

In the early 1940s John Cooper was a budding farmer. He had purchased 10 acres of muck land in Grant, Michigan. And with his two hands, and his trusty John Deere B, he cleared that land of brush and stumps. Before his wife became ill he enjoyed four seasons of onion farming. When she got sick he gave up farming and devoted his life to caring for her. But he kept the land. And among Dale Cooper's favorite boyhood memories are the trips to Grant and the rides his dad gave him on the John Deere.

Years later, after his mother had died and the little farm had been sold, his dad offered his son the beloved tractor. But Dale Cooper lived in Jenison at the time and says: "Where was I going to park a full-size tractor?" He still regrets not having accepted his dad's offer. When, two summers ago, Cooper's brother-in-law located an identical model up for auction in northwest Iowa, the chaplain did not pass up the opportunity.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DUKE ROBINSON

Since purchasing the tractor he has been content to drive it around Calvin's campus. But now comes a much longer journey – a tribute to a father and an echo of gratitude to God.

"My Dad's life was a sheer gift of God to me," says Dale Cooper. "I'm so proud to bear my father's name. Taking a ride on my John Deere was the best, and most fun, way I could think of to say thanks."

TORONTO *Via* **2003 AMSTERDAM Martinair**

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Editorials

On graduations, retirement and post-traumatic stress syndrome

Harry der Nederlanden

Spring doesn't only mean a big transition in nature – flowers popping out of the black earth in a riot of colors, trees draping themselves in gowns of various greens. It also brings a big transition into our lives, at least, those of us still involved with schools and children – and I hope that means all of us to a greater or lesser extent.

The end of the school year is coming. Graduations. Graduation parties. And for students and teachers alike, the anticipation of the summer holidays. For some teachers it means the end of long careers.

In our area I know four different teachers who were treated to retirement parties this past week. I got in on the fun at our Christian school because I was asked to do caricatures of the two retiring in our school. A great opportunity to make them look ridiculous. In the end, however, I resisted the temptation to distort their features overly much and treated them rather kindly.

To tell you the truth, I was a little disappointed by the party. I was looking forward to seeing them roasted. Instead, every speaker treated them kindly, as if convinced they were grief-stricken at the idea of retirement. Everyone seemed to feel sorry for them. Both of them have taught in Christian schools for well over 35 years, so maybe we should feel sorry for them, but not because they can finally say good-bye. The way I see it, we should feel sorry for the rest of the teachers: they have to come back at the end of the summer to teach those little terrors we call our children another year.

On television this morning a Canadian soldier talked about how he still suffered from post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTS) after serving as a peacekeeper in Croatia. Apparently the military hasn't been providing much follow-up care for these soldiers, so now they're suing. Some mothers who had very painful childbirth, a recent study claims, also suffer from PTS. They have nightmares when they think of having another child. Like the soldiers, they get flashbacks, cold sweats and the tremblies. I wonder whether some of them will one day sue their kids for causing them such trauma.

One of our retiring teachers was given a rocking chair as a retirement gift and the other a painting by our local artist-celebrity, George Langbroek. If our school boards were wise, instead of giving them such parting gifts, they would sign up retiring teachers for long-term therapy for post-traumatic stress syndrome. Who knows – it may head off future lawsuits.

Whether teaching itself or retirement is more traumatic, I'll leave to those who have retired to decide. I do know from experience that being a student is traumatic. Have you ever awakened in the middle of the night from a dream in which you are back in school standing in the middle of the hall and all the kids and teachers are laughing and pointing at you? When you look down, you suddenly realize you forgot to put on your pants before going to school that morning. That's a sure sign that you, too, are suffering from PTS.

Among the most traumatizing moments in the life of the student, however, are those events called graduation. Our youngest son, Jonathan, is graduating from grade 12 this year. My wife and I have already gone on three or four quests with him in search of the perfect graduation suit. He has a level head on his shoulders, so, knowing he won't wear the suit very often, he doesn't want to spend very much. He tried on some $500 and $600 suits just for laughs, but he really doesn't want to pay more than $200. So we're on a quest for a $200 suit that fits like a $600 suit.(It's in the genes.)

Maybe one of these days I'll convince him to check out the Value Village or Salvation Army store. But if he had to wear a second-hand suit to his graduation, he'd probably be traumatized for life. In the future psychiatrists will come up with a special name for it: the Second-hand Suit for Graduation Trauma.

When I was graduating from grade 12, I thought that I would have to wear a second-hand suit. I'd already worn it for the yearbook photo. It was a gray, double-breasted suit with a small stripe and wide lapels. No one else wore anything at all like it. I looked a little like one of the characters from a 1930's gangster movie. But I figured I had just enough saved up for the first year of university, and if I bought a suit something else would have to go – maybe meals. Having a new suit for graduation may be important, but when put in terms of having to miss meals, the choice was easy.

The day before graduation, however, my father said, "Come on. We'll go see what they have downtown." We took the Beverly bus into Edmonton and got off on Jasper Avenue, where there were lots of small family stores. That was different. My mom was usually the one to take us shopping, and then we always started at Woodwards, Eatons and Zellers and ended up at Army & Navy.

But my dad had owned a store in the Netherlands that sold all kinds of used stuff, and he'd developed a taste for doing business with Jews. They liked to dicker, and so did my dad. He had taken me here a few years earlier to buy my first baseball glove. I got it for $4.25 because I was "such a polite young man." When I took it to school, however, everyone made fun of my glove, so when we started going from small store to small store dickering for the best price, I was apprehensive. But I ended up with a $125 suit for $75. After we paid, though, the man took away the second pair of pants that came with the suit, but I had no ambition to wear out two pair of suit pants anyhow.

Far more traumatic than getting a suit, however, was getting a date to go with the suit. At least, that was true for the guys. There was one girl in school who made my heart beat faster, but there was another girl whom I often studied with. She was just a chum. After agonizing for some weeks, I asked my chum to the prom. Shortly thereafter, the girl who made my heart go pitter-patter let me know she was available. I never felt more awkward. I wanted to let her know I'd have preferred to go with her, but I really couldn't. What if my date found out she was really a second choice and that I regretted asking her? So I concealed my aching, breaking heart and told the girl of my dreams I already had a date as stoically as I could.

Big traumas at the time, but they don't scar you for life. The really big trauma came when I developed a huge pimple on my chin two days before the big date, and in my determination to eradicate it, I only made it worse. I still have zit nightmares.

Rituals like graduation and retirement celebrations are supposed to make transitions easier, but they become hurdles instead, hurdles as big as a wall. But that's an essential part of life. There are traumas, big and small, all along the road. Growing and going forward in life involves small deaths. We are whittled to size. Something is cut off so we can go on to something else. Without those cuts and wounds, life would lack suspense, drama, the joy of hurdling an obstacle you thought you'd never make.

And one day you look back and think, "Back then I thought that was a nasty cut which would bleed forever. Now I see it was God's way of whittling away at me to shape me for what he had in store." Believers never graduate out of God's school and they never retire from the kingdom; God always keeps giving them more life and more to learn – forever.

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Letters

Thoughts on Petsche's article

A senior responds

I appreciate how Lisa M. Petsche removes the guilt feelings from "caregivers" who must admit an aging "loved one" to a nursing home. ("Easing the transition to long-term care," CC April 28). I am sure that her article is an encouragement to the caregivers, and rightly so. But how does it affect us older folks?

As a specialist in geriatrics, Petsche might be interested in hearing how one person in that age group responds to her views. Let me start by saying that I respect her good intentions to help ease the fears of both "caregiver" and the "patient" in the transition to long term care. But I hope that she will not hold it against me that I look at this issue from the perspective of an 81-year-old, and in that frame of mind I must admit that several points in her article have reaffirmed my fears of becoming dependent on others, including on their decision to admit me to a nursing home.

1) I don't like the term "loved one." It makes me think that the "he" in her article has already been stripped of his family status before he is taken out of active life. The majority of nursing home residents are parents, so I may safely assume this "he" also is a father or grandfather. Yet, he is only identified as "loved one" (a term often used for the dead). Why? My fear: will I, too, some day lose my status as Mom/Oma and my family will refer to me as their "loved one?"

2) The family relation of the "caregiver" to the "loved one" is also hidden. Again, he/she could be the "loved one's" son or daughter. Since the "loved one" is also called "relative," we know that there is a family relation. Yet, what is Petsche's reason for choosing the distant term of "caregiver"? My fear: it is an uncomfortable idea that any distant "relative" can have the power to admit an old person to a nursing home without his consent as Petsche seems to imply when she warns: "your relative is likely to express anxiety and anger about institutionalization, feeling frightened and abandoned."

3) It depresses me that the "loved one's" institutionalization is so determinedly irreversible, almost to the point of cold-heartedness when Petsche counsels: "If he asks you to take him home, gently but firmly reinforce that this is no longer an option." My fear: I picture myself suffering in a nursing home and how it would feel to be begging my son to take me home, and in a pragmatic way him "gently but firmly" telling me that "this is no longer an option."

4) I find many of the steps by which the "loved one" is coached into this irreversible admission almost humiliating to the "loved one." If "he" is still in his right mind, he may well see through all these ploys and increase his anger and resistance to the admission. I cannot help but find that many of her suggestions, like letting him take "his favored blanket," sound like Petsche is counseling a mother of a frightened five-year-old on his first day to kindergarten. My fear: that the younger generation will gradually view me, and treat me, as if I have become a child, while in reality I'm still in my right mind.

Yes, my fears of a future in a nursing home are legion. But I fear for good reason. In the summer issue of *Breaking Barriers*, Rev James Vanderlaan describes in a brief but realistic article a nursing home as a place where you are completely deprived of privacy; where your living space is reduced to just one room with an unlocked door and which you must share with another person. With the door open wide all day, you have no control over who walks into your room nor over who may visit you unannounced, nor over the loud conversation carried on just outside your open door, nor over the volume of your neighbor's TV and radios playing in the next room. Vanderlaan concludes that "life with a disability can be hard in itself, but when the disabilities make nursing home care necessary, the cramped conditions and loss of freedom, privacy, and dignity may make life unbearable."

Even society's famous harbor a fear for nursing homes. I watched the well-known TV host Larry King being asked in an interview "What is your greatest fear in life?" Without a moment's hesitation he replied: "Having to go into a nursing home!"

Trudy Joldersma
Strathroy, On.

Differing opinions

In the April 28 issue David Koyzis wrote about problems with American unilateral foreign policy. I thought it very educational. Needless to say, I fully agreed.

Next, there was a letter from Andy Kramer... who complains that Antonides made very demeaning comments about Jim Wallis, an American peace activist.

If his statements are true, how could that article from Antonides be published and the writer even receive praise for his insight?

Are all writers not bound by the same rules as Hielema?

We all make mistakes, but I hope that our editor is able to say sorry to Hielema and ask him to come back.

Hans Katerberg
Gowanstown

Unions and health care reform

CLAC director responds to Ron Gray

I was surprised to read Ron Gray, National Leader of the Christian Heritage Party, state that "the only beneficiaries [of Canada's existing health care system] are the unions. That's why they are the ones opposing any reform of the system." ("Health Care: Introduce User Fees," CC, May 12, 2003, p.17.) I wonder whether Mr. Gray would support a statement which, in similar fashion, lumps all political parties together with such a generalization?

Christian Labour Assocation of Canada, together with a number of affiliated locals, represents more than 5000 Canadian health care workers. Many of those are employed as part of the health-care system, in nursing homes, homes for the aged, and hospitals.

CLAC has been a regular advocate of reform in health care, specifically in long-term care. For more information on this, visit the CLAC website at www.clac.ca, click on "What's New", then "Publications", then "Government Submissions". Initiatives such as the "Beds Are Not Enough" task force of 2000-2001 illustrate CLAC's commitment to making positive suggestions for health care change.

Even aside from CLAC's position and activities, it is not accurate to suggest that other trade unions oppose "any reform of the system." In fact, trade unions involved in the health care system often advocate reform – but not necessarily changes of the type that the Christian Heritage Party suggests.

Finally, I would ask Mr. Gray to consider that the proposed system of having the patient pay the "second $1000" of his or her annual health care cost would be catastrophic for many of the elderly residents being cared for by our members, as it would be for the thousands of Canadian workers who take nearly a month to earn that much money.

Ed Bosveld, Provincial Director CLAC
Chatham, ON

The Iraq war and U.S. unilateralism

A letter that was lost in cyberspace for two months:

The Iraq war question is agonizingly difficult. On balance, I do not support the US/UK military invasion.

Only time will tell, but I do not believe this will bring democracy to Iraq, nor make the world a safer place. History shows that democracy does not come from the barrel of a gun. Why would it be different in this case?

Growing US unilateralism makes for a fearful future. Abraham Lincoln, while a congressman, saw the US-Mexican war as an act of imperialistic aggression but his objection was based on the principle that allowing war on the suspicion of an invasion inevitably leads to abuse of power. He wrote, "Allow the President to invade a neighboring nation, whenever he shall deem it necessary to repel an invasion, ... and you allow him to make war at pleasure."

Some argue Bush is justified to invade Iraq, but even if that is true, where will it stop? What now are the new parameters?

Lincoln, as President, also noted that when both sides think God is on their side they can't both be right, but they can both be wrong.

Also, Lincoln has no patience with the charge that Canada's position undermines our friendship with the US. He stood with the Abolitionists to the extent they opposed slavery, but stood against them when attempting to repeal the fugitive laws. He wrote, "Stand with anybody while he stands right, and part with him when he goes wrong." Right and wrong are the correct criteria, not whether it helps to sell two by fours.

Nick Loenen

Christian Courier

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Letters/Opinion

Winnipeg on same-sex unions

To the Committee for Contact with the Government of the Christian Reformed Church in Canada.

Recently we, the council of Transcona CRC, read the CCG's submission to the House of Commons entitled *Same-Sex Unions: A Case for Just Pluralism* as well as the related document to the churches entitled *Marriage at a Crossroads: A Case For Pluralism in Interdependent Relationships.* We applaud the committee's defence of marriage as an exclusive relationship between one man and one woman that must maintain its unique status under law. However, we are concerned about the committee's argument in favor of legal recognition for same-sex couples.

Our response addresses the following areas:

1) The arguments made in the submission and in the address to the churches.

2) The circumstances that led to the drafting of these documents.

3) The way in which the CCG spoke for the Canadian CRCs.

A. The Arguments

1. To begin with, the CCG states, "Our understanding of justice is rooted in an assumption: *people have intrinsic dignity and related rights because they are created in the image of God, no matter what their creed, color, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.*" On the basis of this valid principle the committee concludes, "It follows, therefore, that church members ought to affirm the validity of legal recognition of long-term and committed same-sex interdependent relationships" (*Same-sex Unions,* Point 2, Paragraph 4).

The argument does not follow. To affirm the equality of all people as made in God's image does not commit us to legally recognize all interdependent relationships. The former is a matter of justice. The latter is not. Our Judeo-Christian tradition has given us our sure standard for justice: the intrinsic dignity of all people as created in the image of God. That same tradition affirms monogamous, heterosexual marriage as the *only* sexually intimate interdependent relationship consistent with our intrinsic dignity as God's image-bearers. For this reason, God's standard for justice commits us *both* to guard peoples' intrinsic dignity and related rights *and* to deny legal recognition for same-sex unions.

Unfortunately, the Judeo-Christian Ethic, which historically has shaped our nation's understanding of justice and the rule of law, has been replaced by a commitment to **pluralism** (cf. *Same-sex Unions,* Point 3, Paragraph 1). Consistent pluralism and any normative standard for the rule of law are incompatible. As a result, pluralism and the Judeo-Christian Ethic are mutually exclusive foundations upon which to build a nation. Only the Judeo-Christian Ethic provides a sure foundation for true justice and the rule of law in Canada.

The Christian Reformed Church in Canada, through the committee, has failed to speak prophetically on this point. Instead, the committee has connected justice and pluralism together in an unholy marriage. This is evident in the title *Same-sex Unions: A Case for Just Pluralism.* As a result, justice now demands that we provide legal recognition to diverse interdependent relationships *on the basis of evolving sexual mores.* What if polygamy, pedophilia, and bestiality were to become socially acceptable? Would pluralistic justice demand that these too receive legal recognition? By what standard would we say "No"?

Unfortunately, the Judeo-Christian Ethic has been replaced by a commitment to pluralism

2. The committee states that, "Governments have an interest in legally protecting marriage since it has significant potential to provide social stability, promote individual, familial and communal well-being and prevent vulnerabilities from developing" (*Same-sex Unions*, Point 2, Paragraph 2). The committee recognizes the importance of legally recognizing the uniqueness of heterosexual marriage under law for the public good. This we heartily applaud. However, the committee also argues, "While the law is not able to accord broader social, cultural or religious status or recognition to same-sex interdependent relationships, the commitments and intimacy of the relationships present potential vulnerabilities. Legal rights and obligations that serve to stabilize interdependent relationships and allay potential harmful effects within them are, therefore, a matter of public justice. Rights and obligations of this order serve the public good" (*Same-sex Unions,* Point 2, Paragraph 3).

Same-sex unions, by their very nature, are destructive to those involved and to society as a whole. No legal rights or obligations will bring stability to relationship that are inherently destructive. Rather, justice recognizes that "A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:1). Mercy recognizes that often a man must first reap what he sows for his own well-being in the end. The committee's argument at this point is similar to those who argue that legalized abortion protects women from illegal abortionists with their unsafe practices. In the end, the 'cure' is worse than the 'sickness.'

B. The Circumstances

We want to acknowledge the difficult position that Christians active in politics face today. Sadly, unelected judges drive legislation in our nation. The committee warned that "Failure to acknowledge legal equality among different interdependent relationships will result in a court imposed definition of marriage that erases differences between relationships – the consequences for marriage, justice and pluralism will be significant" (*Marriage at a Crossroads,* Argument 5). In addition, "The courts have given the Parliament 24 months to make the legal changes that will remove this discrimination. If Parliament fails to act, the courts will automatically strike down the traditional definition of marriage" (*Marriage at a Crossroads,* Intro, Paragraph 1).

Given these circumstances, the committee's submission is more likely to be taken seriously at the parliamentary level. As a result, the unique legal status of marriage in Canada may be preserved – for now. However, we believe that the CRC in Canada stands to lose far more than we gain from the committee's submission. In the process we have failed to speak God's truth with a clear, prophetic voice. We have not warned our government that ignoring God's standards for sexual relationships will bring destructive consequences to those involved and our society as a whole. We have not called our governments back to a Judeo-Christian Ethic as the foundation for true justice.

C. The CCG as CRC's Official Voice

We acknowledge the need for the church to speak prophetically to the government today. However, we are concerned that a denominational committee has spoken on behalf of the churches on such a crucial issue without proper deliberation by the churches themselves. The position the CCG has taken on this issue does not reflect the position of Transcona Christian Reformed Church. The process by which the CRC in Canada speaks to the government should be re-examined.

The Council of Transcona Christian Reformed Church, Winnipeg.

Variety - the spice of life in CC

I was happier about the furor over Bert's columns than his dismissal. I was distressed to learn that many people took such issue with *Bert's* opinions and thoughts they cancelled the entire paper.

When there is no controversy or concern, there is usually complacency and indifference. The surest sign of life and growth among the living is struggle. In Canada we only have to look a little south to find out what happens when a magazine exchanges difficult issues for newsy items and more pats on the back than corner kicks. This is less criticism than a reminder that the middle line in the middle of the road requires that we drive on one side or the other.

When my dad's gift subscription runs out, I'll be renewing the Christian Courier on my own tab. I don't agree with every thing printed, but I find signs of vigorous and varied Christian life in the paper. Christians are eager, anxious, puzzled, jubilant, thoughtful, boring, ridiculous, clumsy, teaching and eloquent. I feel – thrilled, actually, to be part of the church when I read it.

As for me, I would urge the editor not to choose to write a little endlessly about socks and characterize a woman as wont and even able to spend hours looking for one inert inconsequential sock – in the very issue that offers opportunity to talk about what it means to be responsible, scholarly, Christian journalists . . . but . . . that is also the beauty of the Christian Courier for me.

Johanna Kuyvenhoven
Hornby Island, B.C.

Reply

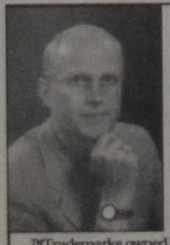
Bert promises to be back with a monthly column D.V. after a summer break. It is not my intent to narrow the range of discussion in CC, but to widen it.

CC is committed to the position that the Reformed worldview is the most ecumenical there is, for that is what Scripture demands.

We must challenge one another – with the Word of God. In fact, we are even encouraged to challenge God with his own words.

As for looking for missing socks, God is even there. However, I admit to altering the facts occasionally. My wife lets me look for my own socks. I just thought getting the wife in the picture would add a nice domestic touch – my contribution to the exaltation of marriage. (Oops, I slipped into irony again.)

Harry



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Media

Bend It like Beckham bends reality - and scores

Harry der Nederlanden

Bend It like Beckham is a feel-good film that everyone but the most hard-hearted cynic will enjoy. The story centers about a teenage girl, Jess, a tomboy who has fallen in love with soccer. The Beckham in the title is a British soccer star known for being able to curve (bend) the ball past the goalkeeper into the net.

To realize her dream of playing soccer on an all-girl team, Jess has to bend more than the ball. Jess is the nickname of Jessminder Bjambra, an East Indian name. Her family is Sikh; although they came to England as refugees from Uganda, they are now successful in their adopted country and proud of it. However, they still live according to Sikh traditions, and in the world of Jess's parents girls are expected to learn how to cook elaborate ethnic dishes and learn how to behave as good wives.

Prominent on the living room wall of her home downstairs is the picture of a Sikh holy man, to whom Jess's mother often talks about her difficult daughter. Upstairs the daughter talks to a large picture of the British soccer star Beckham, sharing dreams she dare not share with her parents.

While playing a pick-up game of soccer with some male friends in the park, Jess meets the tall, blond, very English girl Juliet, who admires her soccer skills and invites her to join the local girl's team. The two girls become a dazzling twosome on the soccer field and good friends off.

To fulfill her soccer dreams, however, Jess has to find ways to fool her parents so she can go to the practices and games without being found out.

Juliet, her friend, also has a mother who wants her to be more feminine, so the two girls experience similar tensions. However, Jess's problems are compounded by ethnic ways that are at odds with that of the dominant culture. On a couple of occasions, she is exposed and is forced into the old mold, but each time the lure of soccer wins out.

The tensions between Juliet and her mother and between Jess and her family never shade toward the tragic, however, as both girls continue to respect their parents, and in both cases we see a genuine concern by the parents for the welfare of their children. The tensions, therefore, never seem to threaten the strong family bonds; they are portrayed primarily as differences that lead to (comical) misunderstandings.

Several parallel situations are set up in the movie to mirror each other with slight differences (or at least the differences are made slight). Although both girls develop a crush for their male coach, Juliet's mother overhears a conversation that leads her to suspect that the girls are in love with one another. Similarly, when the girls are spotted with their heads together by another Sikh family, her parents are told that Jess was seen kissing an English boy in public. Juliet's short hair led them to think she was a boy.

Another parallel is developed when Jess confides her troubles to one of the male Sikh friends she played soccer with in the park. Her problems with ethnic parental expectations lead him to confess that he is gay. In order to be themselves, both have to defy the traditions of their community.

A love interest develops between the male coach and one of his female players -- another boundary that is threatened.

So the film deals with several boundaries – of ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation and religion -- as obstacles to self-fulfilment.

None of the plots and subplots are very original, in fact, they are quite formulaic. Yet, they are brought off with such energy and good-will that we even delight in the rather cheesy ending as Jess arrives in the nick of time to provide the edge for her team to capture the championship. By that time we have been seduced by the celebration of difference that we are quite willing to join in the celebrations.

Bend It like Beckham will remind those who have seen *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* of the celebration of ethnic difference and acceptance in that movie. In both movies the depth and the nature of people's commitment to their traditions – here Sikh, in the other Greek Orthodox – have to be downplayed. In fact, they are deprived of any real depth.

In both movies they are portrayed largely as colorful, often endearing eccentricities that involve relatively inconsequential things like exotic dress, food, dances and rituals. Underneath, the implication is, people are much the same: mothers want their daughters to find happiness the way they did, and fathers want to protect them while they pursue dreams similar to their own.

None of the differences in values must be allowed to become an obstacle to the happy ending and to the dream of integration; otherwise, this would no longer be a comedy.

In allowing all such differences to melt away like snow before the bright star of pursuing one's individual dream for self-realization, do such comedies trivialize the

continued on page 11...

Getting Some Direction from the Monastics

CAMPUS CULTURE

Peter Schuurman

There is a Sufi saying, "When the student is ready, the teacher will come." This seems true when you take a casual glance around the educational world. Graduate students receive supervisors. Chefs, mechanics, electricians are apprenticed by masters. Pianists sweat under the watchful eye of the accomplished artist. But under the guidance of whom shall the Christian learn and grow?

We are familiar with the Christian counsellor, whose task it is to help you with a specific problem. We have all had a mentor, the older friend who walks with us as we grow. A few of us even had a Sunday School teacher. But what if there was someone who was specially trained in understanding the movements of God's Spirit who could guide us deeper into the heart of God?

You are the Data

I was recently at an evangelical pastors conference in which one of the workshops explored the ancient art of spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is a guided exploration of one's relationship to God. A trained director will listen to the life and soul experiences of a student and ask key questions that promote growth, understanding, and honesty in facing life's pains and joys. The Catholic religious orders of Jesuits and Carmelites have been doing this for centuries, but it is garnering some more popular appeal today for Christians who seek a deeper discernment of God's ways in their life. (Janette Bakke's book *Holy Invitations* is an introduction to this trend.)

We are predisposed as Protestants to seeking God's heart through the Bible. A good devotional or theology book is a further aid in that same pursuit. But spiritual direction takes your *life* as its primary data, your everyday struggles, relationships, and dreams. This includes your regular reading of the Bible (often in the form of "lectio divina"), but also your financial anxieties, your adventures in romance, and your imaginative life. In each of these the question is asked: Where is God in this?

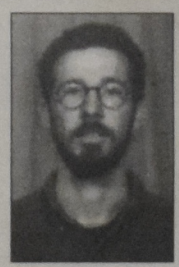
I received spiritual direction from a Carmelite Brother over a two year period. In my experience, the spiritual director is first and foremost a *listener*. They listen for the deep longings you may not be able to speak, and for the voice of God in and around those depths. The director wants to model and facilitate listening, so that you may hear the rebuke, call, and encouragement of God in your life. Most of all, to hear God ask, "Will you trust me?"

Becoming Zusya

Life is difficult. For modern human beings, its hectic, too. To stop and reflect on your life as it unfolds is an act of faith that leads us from knowing *about* God in our minds to knowing God in our experience. The "spirituality" section in our local bookstore is expanding its shelves because people do not want to know other people's thoughts on God but rather they want to know God for themselves. Sadly, they often do this outside of a community of faith, and apart from trained clergy. They remain isolated spiritual wanderers, risking self-indulgence and spiritual stagnation.

God calls every student of his to an adventure in faith. A spiritual director is the skilled companion who helps you hear the Master's voice and serve him freely and cheerfully. If we are truly honest with ourselves, we know we are creatures easily deceived, and most often the perpetrator of the duplicity is none other than ourself. We need help to stay the course and become the people God intends we become.

A Hasidic story makes this life task clear. Rabbi Zusya, when he was an old man said: "In the coming world, they will not ask me, 'Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me, 'Why were you not Zusya?'"



Peter Schuurman is currently on sabbatical from his campus chaplaincy work at Brock University, in St. Catharines, Ont.

Church

Four Christians murdered in Colombia

Colombia (Compass) — Twenty-five armed men entered a rural church in northern Colombia the evening of May 6 and murdered its 80-year-old evangelical pastor and three other believers, confirmed the head of CEDECOL, the nation's evangelical alliance.

The Cali newspaper El País reported that armed men called the victims by name and attacked them in the doorway of the church in front of other parishioners, then fled into a wooded area.

CEDECOL issued a statement calling for armed groups to respect life, expressing its concern for the recent turn of events, and reaffirming evangelicals' rejection of armed force against any human being as an expression of the search for justice and equality.

According to a military report released in April, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) pose the most serious threat to Christians in Colombia. Despite the findings, Roman Catholic and Protestant evangelical church leaders say that stationing troops or police officers at churches would likely place them in even greater danger.

"We don't believe that this would solve the problem for us. All citizens should be protected," said Hector Pardo, president of the Evangelical Council of Colombia. He thought that increasing troop presence in churches would likely make them even bigger targets.

The army report said that armed groups have killed 56 Catholic leaders in the past 19 years. Of those murders, 14 occurred in the last four years. Pardo said that about 30 evangelical ministers were killed in 2002 alone.

Army press officer, Major José Espejo, said that attacks on Christians are increasing, he thinks, because the church rejects violence and has spoken out against murders, extortion, and kidnapings carried out by armed groups.

Tutu wants South African reparations as truth commission findings' spur suit

Peter Kenny

Cape Town, South Africa (ENI) — South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission into the apartheid era has officially wound up investigations, but its repercussions will dog the country unless acted upon believes Desmond Tutu, the commission's chair and former Anglican archbishop of Cape Town.

On March 21, Human Rights' Day in South Africa, Tutu handed over the final report of the TRC, as the truth commission is known, to South Africa's president, Thabo Mbeki.

"Wealth tax"

Tutu urged that compensation be paid immediately to apartheid's victims, saying "they have waited long, too long for their reparations", and he called for a "wealth tax" on businesses that profited from apartheid.

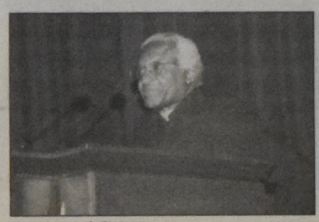
And if the South African government does not act quickly, court action in the United States could trigger further pressure on the government to act. US lawyer Ed Fagan, using Tutu's position, on Friday honed in on South Africa's diamond industry, demanding millions of dollars be paid to South African workers exploited during the apartheid era.

Fagan, who took the lead in getting Swiss banks to pay out costly reparations to Holocaust victims, filed a suit in New York and in Nevada, against Anglo American, the South African and global mining giant, and its cash producing diamond business arm, De Beers.

The US lawyer demanded the company pay US$6.1 billion to its former workers.

Case made for reparations

Fagan said he was acting for people who had been wrongfully sacked for lawful labor strikes; who were subjected to forced labor under inhumane conditions; and for those who were wrongfully attacked, imprisoned and tortured during protests by working people.



Desmond Tutu

The TRC said in its final report that a case could be made for reparations against South African mining firms, including Anglo American.

The commission singled out Anglo American as a company that benefited from cheap black labor guaranteed under the apartheid system.

Anglo American's corporate affairs executive director in Johannesburg, Michael Spicer said, however, the company did not consider the payment of reparations to be appropriate.

"Anglo American strongly rejects the efforts made by US lawyers and others to use US courts to resolve important issues for South Africa's future," said Spicer. "We firmly believe that our opposition helped to bring about an end to the apartheid system."

Final report

Presenting the TRC's final report to the South African president in March, Tutu urged South Africa's business sector and its government to address the issue of reparations speedily since he warned it had the potential to destabilize the country.

"As a nation we have a legal but, more importantly, a moral obligation to honor in paying reparations," Tutu said. "We pray that our nation will consider the 3 billion rand [about US$400 million] or so which the TRC proposal is estimated to cost, [to be] money well spent and in a very real sense cheap at the price."

The TRC, set up in 1995, heard evidence from victims and perpetrators of violent acts carried out by both the apartheid regime and those struggling against it.

Chinese cult "Lightning from the East" preying on Chinese Christians

by Xu Mei

NANJING, China (Compass) — Lightning from the East is China's most dangerous secret cult. It targets house churches, infiltrates them and tries to destroy them. Christian leaders have suffered blackmail, kidnaping, beatings and physical injury as a result of this activity.

In April of last year, Lightning from the East pulled off its most spectacular coup by simultaneously kidnaping 34 leaders of the South China Church, one of the country's most evangelical house church movements.

At the time, sympathetic observers both in China and overseas speculated whether such a massive operation could succeed without at least some collusion on the part of local authorities and police.

The central government in Beijing has ordered a crackdown on the cult and expressed sympathy to members of the South China Church, who went to Beijing in desperation for help. Eventually, the captors released all the abducted leaders.

But, at the local level police are notoriously corrupt. They often succumb to the temptation to make deals with the criminal underworld, of which this cult is a part.

Evidence has now emerged from northern China of this type of collusion. Sister Wang has long been an effective house church leader in Inner Mongolia. However, in recent years there has been a strong incursion of Lightning from the East cultists; they have taken over many of the house churches in her neighborhood.

In April, Wang reported that members of the cult approached the local Public Security Bureau and gave the police a bribe to arrest her. They concocted a false charge as an excuse — alleging she had written "anti-Party propaganda" — and threatened Wang with an eight-to-ten-year prison sentence.

Fearing for her safety and even for her life, Sister Wang fled to another part of China, far removed from her hometown. In her latest communication with the international Christian community, she asked for prayer.

To be labeled a cultist in China is a serious matter that leads to arrest and imprisonment. Ironically, cultists themselves are able to take advantage of endemic corruption to target Christians, who are most opposed to cults.

Grain separates men from women – temporarily

Grand Rapids (CRC) -- One of CRWRC's programs is to help farmers to improve their crops. Ary Vreeken a CRWRC staff person in Niger is helping a number of farmers from three villages discover a better Millet variety. The farmers engaged in hands-on testing of several varieties. These new varieties were compared against one another as well as against the traditional variety.

Gender-role expectations

"Part of the agreement was that the women would also have an opportunity to test the millet and have a say," Ary explains. "Two of the villages are strongly Muslim, with gender-role expectations to match. In one of the villages the women barely dare to come into the same meeting space as the men. They stay outside and send one representative in to speak with the men." Despite these expectations for men and women, CRWRC insisted that the women have a say about the millet options.

"To the men's surprise, the women had unanimously selected an improved variety that was different from the choice that the farmers had made! The women had found that the variety of choice had larger grain, was easier to pound, the dough rose more, and the taste was better than the other varieties." The men, on the other hand, had selected a variety based on how well it grew. The presentation proceeded in a long and lively discussion between the men and women.

Finally, the men agreed that it would be better to grow a millet variety that the women were more satisfied with, especially since the women's choice of variety tasted much better than the men's choice.

"The men allowed their choice to be overturned and accepted the verdict of the women," Ary concludes. "This is to me , both, amusing and significant. It also is a practical example of how we encourage gender-balance and gender equality by purposefully encouraging gender-specific village groups to enter into dialogue with one another."

CRWRC is aware that successful development relies on the contribution and cooperation of both genders. Most importantly, this type of activity gives women the opportunity to speak in front of a large gathering, when otherwise their voices are never to be heard.

Church

Christian Reformed Church overtured to cut ties with First Toronto

Classis Toronto met May 22 to discuss further the matter of First Toronto CRC, which decided on June 10, 2002 to accept as full members homosexual persons living in committed relationships and also make them eligible for becoming office bearers in the church.

At its January 23, 2003 meeting, Classis Toronto urged First Toronto to repent of its action and withdraw its decision and set dates for further meetings to deal with the matter.

First Toronto requested a period of 15 months to articulate its position "with God's Word as [its] guide, and to compose a pastoral framework of ministry that would be in harmony with Synod's call for ministry, would honor the Great Commandment, and would restore to dignity those who have often been marginalized in our church."

Toronto received two overtures. One from Maranatha CRC of Woodbridge which asked that Classis declare that First Toronto, by virtue of its decision to accept persons living in committed same-sex relationships into full communion, has left the Christian Reformed denomination and that the pastor of First Toronto, Nick Overduin, be deposed. The other, from Springdale Christian Reformed Church, asked Classis to appoint a committee to conduct interviews with council members of First Toronto to determine where each of them stand on the issue and to depose those who persist in going against the teachings of the church.

At its May 5 meeting of council, First Toronto, "in response to the acute distress its response has caused," had already decided to defer any nominations to office of persons in committed same-sex relationships. It had already made a decision earlier not to do so this year, "consistent with [its] expressed deep desire to remain part of the Christian Reformed denomination."

Classis decided to have the prayer and dialogue meeting on June 12,7:00 pm at Richmond Hill CRC and to reconvene this meeting of Classis on June 25 to take up the overtures and the response of First Toronto.The previous schelduled meeting had been canceled due to an ice storm.

Presbyterians polarized on gay ordination

DENVER, Colorado – Prominent on the agenda of the 215th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), which opened May 25 in Denver, Colorado, is once again the issue of opening the ministry to active homosexuals. This is the fourth time in the last five years that the issue is on the agenda.

One of the first overtures up for discussion was a move to tighten church regulations to prevent local churches from defying the denomination's rules against the ordination of active gays and lesbians. Conservatives want to empower the denomination's judicial body so it is able to bring maverick churches into line.

A group within the PCUSA, the Covenant Network, is committed to seeking the removal from the Book of Order of the clause that says office-bearers "must be faithful in marriage between a man and a woman or chaste in singleness." However, they have decided not to call for the question this year because they do not have the votes to win. Instead, they will focus on creating "a more favorable climate" in the "great middle" of the denomination.

Conservatives say the church's leaders and its courts have turned a blind eye to congregations that have openly defied the ban. Earlier this year, conservatives nearly forced an unprecedented recall of last year's delegates to reprimand the defiant churches. It failed primarily because leaders said it would be too costly.

Alex Metherell, an elder from California who spearheaded the recall, told RNS that the church has reached an irreconcilable impasse.

"Everyone's going along saying that we're all brothers and sisters in Christ, but that's baloney," Metherell said. "If you look at what they say, it's two totally different worlds, and it can't continue."

Metherell is also concerned about an upcoming church report on non-traditional families — including gay parents — that he says will be used by liberals to justify gay marriage and gay ordination.

"It's totally contrary to the (church) constitution," he said. "The constitution says that active gay relationships are a sin."

The assembly is also expected to debate at least three resolutions that could alter the church's position on late-term abortions. In 1997, the church voiced "grave moral concern" over late-term abortions, but last year amended its position to allow the controversial procedure when either the mother's or child's life is threatened, or in cases of rape or incest.

One resolution would ban the procedure under the church's health insurance plan, another would remove the rape and incest amendments, and a third would endorse only procedures that give "both the mother and the child the opportunity to live."

[Harry der Nederlanden with stories from the PCUSA website and RNS]

World Baptist leader's call for new global mission agency seen as timely

Cedric Pulford

London (ENI) — The call of the general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, Denton Lotz, for an international Baptist mission agency that could see missionaries from the countries in the southern hemisphere evangelizing in Europe and North America is felt by some leading Baptists as timely.

"The Great Commission was not given only to the West or NATO countries; it was given to all believers," said Lotz, referring to the biblical verses in which Jesus charges the disciples to preach, baptize and make disciples throughout the world.

"If a Nigerian feels called to be a missionary in England, or an Indonesian in Singapore, or an Indian in the Congo, should we not collectively around the world encourage and support this individual?" said Lotz.

International mission agency

The Baptist World Alliance is a fellowship of 206 Baptist unions and conventions representing a community of about 110 million in more than 200 countries.

Lotz said he would work with member bodies from around the world to promote the idea of an international mission agency.

He had made the suggestion at the alliance's global summit on mission in the 21st century, held from May 5 to 9 in Swanwick, England, and attended by leaders from 60 countries. Another opportunity to promote the idea will arise from July 7 to 12 , when Baptists hold a general council in Rio de Janeiro.

A new humility

The leader of Britain's Baptist missionary society, Alistair Brown, told the summit in England: "Many still find it hard to accept that we need to learn, receive and accept help from the countries which were once dependent on us for the light of the gospel."

"We're good at giving, less good at receiving. A new humility to recognize need and accept help is now appropriate."

The idea of an international mission agency was "timely", Brown told ENI, and missionaries from the global south, with their "great spirituality," would have much to offer in Britain.

Brown, who is general director of BMS World Mission, said Baptist communities in the UK had proved reluctant to provide financing for such an international agency or to accept the value of missionaries from the south.

With their evangelizing approach, Baptists in the UK have increased their numbers slightly, while the other mainstream denominations have suffered big drops, according to some studies.

A survey published on May 15 by the UK pollsters Christian Research found that in Scotland, Baptists raised average Sunday attendance by 1 per cent between 1994 and 2002 – echoing trends in England and Wales – while the two largest denominations, the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church, registered falls of 22 per cent and 19 per cent respectively.

Christian Living

Teaching in Russia: the shadow side

Angela Bick

Does your church have an annual picnic? When I was young, I can remember looking forward to this event each summer: open green lawns, picnic tables overflowing with food, children standing in line for watermelon. The *dominee* playing horseshoes and my Sunday School teacher calling out the winners of the three-legged race.

Now imagine, if you can, twenty men bursting out of the bushes to viciously punch and kick the members of my church. The men have shaved heads and knives or broken beer bottles. Everyone tries to run away, leaving behind baskets and blankets, stopping only to help others. There is an injured child, a man with a bloody face collapsed on the sidewalk. He is a deacon. Nobody resists or calls 9-1-1, knowing it would be useless.

If this actually happened to my church, you can be certain that the surrounding community wouldn't ignore it. The event would be on the evening news, in all the national newspapers, and discussed on the radio. However, for the English-speaking Christians living in Moscow who suffered just such an attack, there was no publicity. And events like this one happen with alarming, and increasing, frequency.

World Peace Street

My husband and I moved to Moscow last year to learn Russian and teach English. This language exchange was like a pane of glass: half of the time, we looked through it with amazement down the long corridor of Russia's rich history, but the rest of the time it was a mirror, showing a white Christian Reformed middle-class Canadian reflection. Living in another culture, I think you learn as much about the new as you do about your own, and for me, language was the instrument of discovery. For example, the Russian word for *red* is the same as *beautiful*; the two are interchangeable. So Red Square is thought to be the loveliest place in Moscow – it doesn't originate from Communism. Similarly, while the English have two words, *world* and *peace*, in Russian there is just one: *mira*.

It is appropriate, then, that Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy, a church my husband and I attended while living in Russia, holds services on Prospekt Mira, or World Peace Street. Sadly, however, the small congregation of this inter-denominational, international church experiences very little peace. Fully two-thirds of its members have been subject to acts of violence, but this is not religious persecution. The congregation is largely African and African-American, and they have been the victims of racism.

Danger every day

At a service at Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy in early April of 2002, Pastor John Calhoun read an announcement. It was not about the Honda in the parking lot with its headlights left on, or a call for more baby-sitters in the toddler room. It was from the US Embassy and it warned all foreigners to be careful on April 21, because a group of skinheads had threatened to kill all non-Russians that they saw on that day, the anniversary of Hitler's birth.

After growing up in the homogeneity of Christian Reformed circles, unused to anything more than the friendly rivalry between the Friesians and the Dutch, this type of national stereotyping was shocking. We didn't know how seriously to take it. The Canadian consulate told us that "it would be prudent to exercise caution and avoid speaking English in public." *The Moscow Times*, an English paper read mostly by expatriates, repeated the warning. We decided it was an uncomfortable new feeling, but as long as we kept our mouths shut, not really dangerous.

The People's National Party claims that the swastika is a religious symbol pre-dating the Nazis. However, I cannot help but see it as what my grandparents fought so hard to destroy.

Other members at Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy were more alarmed. They took the letter very seriously, and we quickly learned why. A male refugee from Angola, age 23, said, "I feel danger all day every day." And an economic migrant from Cameroon, age 34, put it even more plainly: "Russia is a sort of prison for people with colored skin."

A task force on racial attacks and harassment at MPC gathered the following information:

• Of those who have fallen victim to racial attack in the last year, 25% report having been hospitalized for treatment of their injuries. A Ghanaian student lost his four front teeth; a Sudanese refugee suffered a broken rib; a refugee from Zaire lay in a coma for two weeks after an attack.

• The perpetrators are usually sober. They are often armed. They are almost always adults – differing from the commonly held notion that the crimes are committed by drunken and relatively harmless teenagers.

• Less than 30% of the attacks are reported to the police. This is because the victims fear further harassment, fines, or deportation if they are refugees.

• The attacks are unpredictable. Even travelling in groups does not provide safety, as the events of last summer's church picnic demonstrated.

Ideals and illusions

One of my Russian students showed me a textbook, meant to practise English, published in 1990. Young students were expected to learn parts of the constitution, such as this excerpt from Article 36: "Citizens of different races and nations have equal rights. There is no race discrimination." The former *United* Soviet Socialist Republic was proud of how its borders encompassed such diverse peoples, moulding them all into Russians.

But an older student named Vera, a woman who grew up under the communist regime, admitted that this equality is and always has been an illusion. The constitution reflected Lenin's ideals, which were never realized, and when Stalin transplanted hundreds of ethnic groups, the enmity grew worse.

In any country, feelings of nationalism tend to increase during turmoil, and Russia is no exception. The pogroms that German Mennonites living in Russia suffered during the Revolution is just one example.

Today, aside from the tension between former members of the USSR and the new Russian Federation, there are thousands of African residents. They are either refugees or students, attracted by the low cost of universities — a remnant of the Soviet Union's attempt to convert Third World Countries to socialism. But now that Russia is essentially a Third World Country itself, the extreme nationalists are convinced that ethnic cleansing will solve their economic problems. President Putin made a speech in April of 2001 where he made clear that racism was unacceptable in a country shared by many ethnic groups. It is unfortunate that this statement is as far from the truth as the ideals in the old Soviet textbook.

Swastika

Two years ago, the swastika was something I saw in old war movies. While living there, however, it stared at me boldly from tattooed shoulders and storefront graffiti. It was even scribbled in the margins of some homework assignments I collected. I began to see it with a new, unhappy understanding.

Book written in 60's entitled "Africa in the fight for freedom"

The People's National Party claims that the swastika is a religious symbol pre-dating the Nazis. However, I cannot help but see it as what my grandparents fought so hard to destroy. Amnesty International has stated that "the police do nothing to stop the heinous acts, nor does the government oppose them."

Embassies have complained to the Foreign Ministry, but Russian officials downplay the issue. Tatyana Kostyuni, a Moscow police officer, said, "They are not really dangerous. There are so few of them."

This position poses the biggest challenge for victims of racial attacks. They cannot expect sympathy from bystanders, from the police, or from the government. But the swastika, and all it stands for, cannot be allowed a reincarnation. The danger that faces ethnic minorities living in Russia must be made public, even if it has to begin on the international level.

Pray for the safety of all Africans living in Russia. Pray for the members of Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy, so that they can worship God without fear in their church, embodying both their address and Christ's mandate as they work towards global unity on World Peace Street.

Sources: MPC newsletter, Aug. 2002; MPC Task Force Survey on Racial Attacks. Used by permission of Dr. Noel Calhoun;

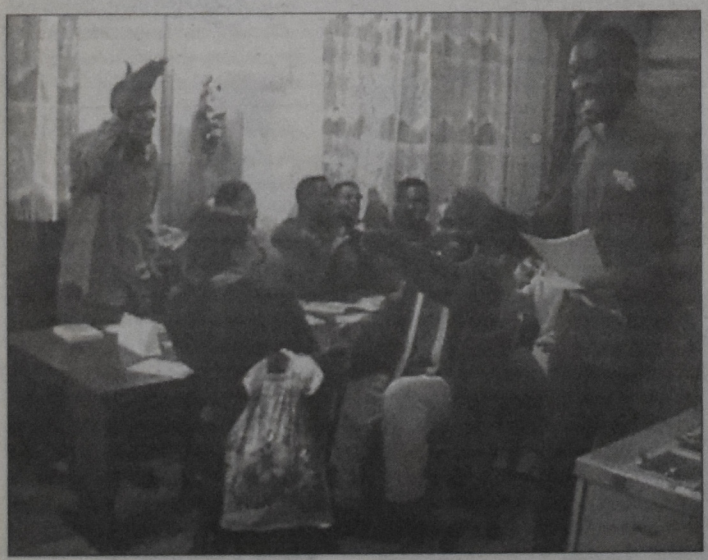
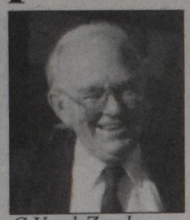


PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN CALHOUN

Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy - YAS (youthand stucent group)

Church/Psychology

What will the CRC now say and do on war and peace?


G.VandeZande

Reliable sources say that the Board of Trustees of the Christian Reformed Church is recommending that Synod 2003 appoint a study committee to reflect on a discussion paper on War and Peace presented to the Board by a denominational working group.

If appointed, the study committee will be asked to recommend, "guidance and advice" to the CRC and report back to Synod in 2006. The study committee is expected to pay special attention to the following concerns:

1. The changed international environment and its implications for the CRC's position regarding the use of military power.
2. The use of military force in preemptive and preventive warfare and how these relate to principles of just war such as just cause, last resort, and competent authority.
3. The continued proliferation of nuclear weapons as legitimate instruments of war fighting in light in Synod's declarations in 1982.
4. The underlying theology and principles of peacemaking and peacekeeping to inform the conscience and praxis of the church.

As the working group points out, the CRC has addressed issues of war and peace with substantial studies in 1939, 1977, and 1982. According to the Board report to this year's Synod: "Our present situation requires that we remember, reaffirm, and review the essence of what was said in the past before we undertake a new study of these issues." Indeed, "New circumstances require a new address to old issues and questions."

Dramatic changes in warfare and tragic human and environmental consequences have occurred during recent years, especially since September 11, 2001.

Obviously, neither the Synod and the churches, nor their agencies and committees, can really be silent in the face of these enormous developments and horrific crises. Certainly, we should give public expression to the life-affirming message proclaimed by Jesus and the Scriptures. They daily challenge us to proclaim and practice justice, peace, liberation and reconciliation in our war-torn world.

Meanwhile, it would certainly be wise and timely if Synod 2003 would send open letters, advocating international peace-and-justice actions, to the United Nations' Secretary-General, the United States' President, and Canada's Prime Minister. Such urgent appeals for joint peace-making efforts were issued by the CRC's Synod in 1982. Today, similar messages, based on the CRC's historic stance for biblical justice and peace, would be appropriate reminders of what we confess in our 1986 Contemporary Testimony Our World Belongs to God:

Following the Prince of Peace,

We are called to be peacemakers,
and to promote harmony and order.
We call on our governments to work for peace;
we deplore the arms race
and the horrors that we risk.
We call on all nations to limit their weapons
to those needed in the defense of justice and freedom.
We pledge to walk in ways of peace,
confessing that our world belongs to God;
he is our sure defense.
This is the least we can do in faith, hope and prayer.

Gerald Vandezande, C.M.
Scarborough, ON.

Ten habits that predict marital success

GETTING UNSTUCK
Arlene Van Hove

In the last few decades various books have come out advocating success in life by way of developing various habits. Now researchers have conducted a series of long-term studies in which they examined the questions: what do people who are destined to succeed in marriage actually do differently from people who are destined to fail? They identified specific interpersonal habits or abilities that distinguish people who are destined to succeed. These habits are divided into two groups. For instance, 1) how you respond to your spouse when you feel misunderstood and mistreated, and 2) how you build the emotional bond with your spouse. So, if you want to succeed in your marriage, you may want to develop the following habits:

When you feel misunderstood or mistreated you:

1. Avoid a judgmental attitude - Usually the attitude you have when you are upset will tend to breed cooperativeness or defensiveness in your spouse. Studies show spouses who feel criticized are less likely to cooperate. If you want to succeed in your relationship you may want to tell yourself your spouse is entitled to his/her thinking but you do not necessarily have to give in.

2. Standing up for yourself without putting your partner down - If you want more respect and cooperation from your spouse you may need to refrain from judging your partner's feelings and opinions, and simply expect him/her to give as much weight to yours.

3. Finding the understandable part - Most of us tend to think our own position is reasonable and our spouse's position is unreasonable. However, at some point in the argument, those who succeed manage to find something understandable about what their spouse is seeing.

4. Giving equal regard - Most often partners are only willing to accept influence from their spouses if in some way the spouse can make their reasoning compelling. The problem is that for most of us our spouse's reasoning seldom seems as worthy as our own. Yet, people destined to succeed easily accept their partner's influence.

5. Offering assurance - When you have a relationship history of misunderstandings and hurts both spouses begin assuming the other spouse will be critical or dismissing of his/her feelings or opinions. You can counteract your spouses' natural tendency to make such assumptions by offering plenty or encouraging assurances.

6. Identifying and explaining what is at stake - When you are in the midst of an upset you realize there is something bigger at stake. Your ability to explain the underlying reasons for being upset will help your spouse become more cooperative and understanding.

Building the Emotional Bond:

7. Curiosity about your partner's world - Studies suggest that significant difference between people destined to succeed and fail is the knowledge each partner has about the other's world. Taking time to know details of each other's worlds is predictive of marital success.

8. Keeping sight of the positive - Research studies suggest when spouses are upset with one another, they underestimate the positive things that happen in their relationship by 50%. If you want your relationship to succeed you need to develop the habit of noticing, thinking about and talking about the small, positive things that happen when things are good.

9. Making and responding to "Bids" for connection. Studies show that people who initiate small acts of caring or connection, delivered without strings attached are much more likely to end up in happy marriages than people who neglect such small acts. In other words, people who succeed allow themselves to need nurturing from their spouses and provide emotional nurturing as well.

10. Pursuing "shared meaning." People destined to succeed in their marriages initiate and respond well to discussion about each partner's hopes and dreams about their life together. They are committed to both their own hopes and dreams as well as their spouse's.

These results have been compiled by Brent Atkinson, PhD., and were presented at a recent marriage and family conference. If we look carefully we will see the underlying theme, throughout these findings, suggests spouses turn their hearts towards each other during difficult times. In other words, they advocate clear Christlike responses to challenging marital roles! There is no doubt, developing habits takes time but with an abundance of mutual grace the journey will be worth the effort.

Arlene Van Hove is a psychotherapist with Cascade Christian Counselling Association in Surrey, B.C.

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importance of cultural, sexual and religious standards and differences?

In real life, we know of course, such differences are seldom overcome as easily as in this exuberant, feel-good comedy. In fact, they are more likely to raise deep suspicion, division, hatred and violent exclusion.

However, the very purpose of romantic comedies of this sort is to celebrate a dream of possibilities, not to remain caught in the real. Near the end of the film, the camera switches back and forth between the exuberant Sikh wedding of Jess's sister and the game for the soccer championship. Both are rituals and symbols of reconciliation, integration and the overcoming of difference and conflict. They are in their dim ways shadows of what God promises will enter our lives in and through his kingdom.

That's why the great Canadian literary historian Northrop Fry saw in romantic comedy something he called "secular scripture." Dreaming of the reconciliation of all things is not a bad thing, but we know it happens only in and through the coming of God's kingdom in Christ. That means, among other things, that we may clap with greater delight than anyone else at such "contrived' happy endings.

Christian Living

Yeast changes everything

By James Van Tholen

Texts: Matthew 13:33; Micah 6:6-8

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

Matthew 13:33

H. DERNEDERLANDEN ILLUSTRATION

I thought the kingdom of heaven was like the Chicago Bulls – every once in a while there's a setback, a loss or two, but at the end of the year it's all the victories that stand out, all the success that's been had. That's what I thought about the kingdom. But then Arie Roodzant died.

Arie was a 61-year-old cattle farmer, a Dutch immigrant, who walked hunched over because of a disease in his legs. He didn't say much, and when he did speak he was so soft you could hardly hear him. He died one day on the edge of his farm while getting water for his animals. It was sudden and unexpected, but yet somehow fitting, because he died in the presence of his best friend, a three-year-old Scottish terrier named Rambo, and those he spent the most time with, his white Charolais cows. That was Arie's life. And that's why, at first, I didn't know what to say at his funeral.

Funerals, after all, are a time to talk about accomplishments. They're a time to look back upon all the progress that's been made, all the ways the kingdom of God has extended its reign through this person. But there wasn't much of that to talk about for Arie. There weren't any heroic acts or decades of service to a church that wouldn't have made it without him; he didn't convert friends or strangers to Jesus Christ; his family life was a struggle. So I didn't know what to say. Because the life that we were remembering that day was a quiet life and a painful life. It wasn't a spectacular life or a successful life. It wasn't like the Chicago Bulls.

Like a new world empire

Helmut Thielicke thought the kingdom of heaven was like a new world empire that would knock down and brush aside every pretender to its throne. Thielicke was one of the fine preachers of our century. He became a minister in Germany about the same time that Adolf Hitler rose to power.

Thielicke says that when he became a pastor he was full of energy and enthusiasm. He couldn't wait to get going and transform the world, certainly to transform Germany. He went into it with the determination to trust in Jesus' saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

"Thielicke says that he would recall those words of Jesus in order to assure himself that even Hitler "and his dreadful power machine were merely puppets hanging by strings in the hands of this mighty Lord."

So the new minister Helmut Thielicke arranged a Bible study. He found a place, he selected a topic, he invited everyone he could think of, he publicized what he was doing, and then he waited for that authority of Jesus Christ to do its stuff. And when the appointed time came, says Thielicke, "I was faced by two very old ladies and a still older organist ....

So this was the extent of the accomplishment of this Lord, to whom all power in heaven and earth had been given, *supposedly* given. And outside marched the battalions of youth who were subject to altogether different lords. This was all he had to set before me on that evening." Three senior citizens who were too old and worn out for Adolf Hitler. The kingdom wasn't like an empire; it was like a nursing home. Helmut Thielicke was disappointed.

"Where is the power?"

Thielicke goes on to say that those who followed Jesus probably felt the same way he did the night of his Bible study. After all, Jesus had come to them preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." And when those people heard that, they knew exactly what to think. They thought that the kingdom of heaven was God sending a Messiah to them, someone who would put their enemies under their feet, who would restore glory to Israel, who would bring wealth and comfort and freedom to every family, every synagogue, every village, every life associated with the people of God. And every nation of the world would recognize the power of that kingdom and stream to Jerusalem.

But that, of course, did not happen. So there were people in Jesus' following who had given up everything – their employment, their families, their homes – in order to be part of the kingdom of heaven, to have the power, and then, a few weeks or months later, were wondering, "Where is the kingdom? Where is the power?" "Sure," they say, "there has been some impressive healing, and some interesting preaching, but we were expecting more, we were expecting glitz and glamor. We thought it would be so much bigger than this. We thought we would see results. We thought the kingdom of heaven was like the kingdom of David. Big. Bright. Glorious."

And how natural that thought is. How easy it is to identify the kingdom that Jesus brings with the kingdoms that we know. How easy it is to look at Superbowl champions and huge crowds and nuclear power and majestic royalty and believe that that's what the kingdom of heaven is like.

You don't have to be big

But it's not. It's not like those big, impressive things at all. It's like yeast. "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." The kingdom of heaven is not like a mighty empire or a crushing tornado or a Superbowl champ. The kingdom of heaven is like yeast.

John Timmer says, "The kingdom of heaven is like a small amount of yeast that leavens a big lump of dough. At first nothing seems to happen. But then, slowly, the whole mass of dough begins to swell and bubble. Christians are like yeast. You and I are like yeast. Our role is not to grow big, but to leaven what is big. The Christian faith is not about big rallies, big churches, big audiences. It's not about public relations, image building, salesmanship and marketing techniques. It's about leavening. And in order to leaven, you don't have to be big."

And that message has to be told again and again, not only in Jesus' time but in Helmut Thielicke's time, and in our time, too. Because yeast never looks all that important. It never looks like it's doing anything. It never looks like it matters – until it's finished. We need to hear these words again and again, because we're prone to look for a kingdom that is big, that produces results.

And that is certainly true today. Today it is common to measure ministry by how big it is, especially the ministry of churches. There was a time when people would ask, "How's your church doing?" and mean by that "Is the worship meaningful? Is the preaching sound? Is there good fellowship and unity?" Today, more and more, when people ask, "How's your church doing?" they mean only one thing: "Is it growing? Can you count the victories? Are you becoming big?"

You don't see it

And that's a shame, because yeast doesn't have to be big. It has to be yeast. For over four hundred years we have said that there are three things that mark a church: the pure proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of discipline. For over four centuries we've said that, wherever there is a true body of Jesus Christ, there will also be these three things – preaching, sacraments, discipline. Often you hear that there should be something else, too – that there should be results; that wherever the true church is, there should be victory. But that's a mistake. Because, more often than not, the kingdom of God isn't something that can be seen, even while it's transforming the world.

And that's exactly what's going on here. It's not a little leavening that we're talking about. The world is being transformed, the whole world. As Robert Farrar Capon says, "it may be stereotypically female work" this woman is pictured as doing, "but she does it with more than stereotypically male energy. This is no slip of a girl making two tiny loaves for her husband's pleasure. This is a baker, folks. Three measures is a bushel of flour, for crying out loud. That's 128 cups! That's 16 five-pound bags! And when you get done putting in the 42 or so cups of water you need to make it come together,

you've got a little over 101 pounds of dough on your hands." The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and leavened a truckload of dough.

But you don't see it happening. You don't get results. Not yet. Literally this parable reads, The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour. It's hidden. You can't point it out. But what a difference it makes.

Also in Red Wings' games

So let the message of the yeast make a difference for us, too. When we are tempted to see God's presence in the church programs we're a part of and to judge that presence by how well they go, how successful they are, let us remember that the beauty of being yeast is that it's working whether you see it or not. The beauty of being yeast is that not only in Sunday school and friendships do we usher in the kingdom of God, but also in Red Wings' games and staff lunches and Manhattan taxicabs we can – quietly, slowly, completely – change everything.

As John Timmer puts it, "So we must keep asking ourselves: Are we leaven or are we dough? Are we a small group of people in whom our Lord has instilled a vision, or are we a big lump of status quo dough?" That's the question this parable puts before us. Not "Are we big enough?" but "Are we willing to be little enough?"

Those famous words of Micah call for the same thing:

With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with
burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased
with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn
for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

No, says Micah, none of those big things are in order.

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Somewhere in those things that are so hard to see lies the secret to being yeast that God will use. Those of us who think we can't make much of a difference in the kingdom of God ought to keep that in mind.

Missing the presence of God

And so should young preachers. For a little while I wondered what to say about a man who was a model in walking humbly with his God because I couldn't find the scorecard that said he was important. The good news is that God doesn't use a scorecard; he uses us. He uses justice and kindness and faithfulness to change the whole world. He uses three people studying his Word in the midst of an evil reign, he uses a little gift who offers a prayer, he uses an immigrant farmer who was never really at home here, and he used a Savior who looked anything but a king.

Martin Luther said that one reason Satan didn't do better opposing Jesus is because he didn't recognize him. He didn't know who he was; he overlooked him, because Jesus conducted himself so humbly and associated with sinners and didn't seem all that important. According to Luther, the devil is farsighted: he looks only for what is big and high and attaches himself to that; he does not look at that which is low down and beneath himself.

It's an easy mistake to make, to think the little doesn't count, to look only for what is big. So Satan is forever missing the presence of God. Because he keeps looking for the big. He doesn't realize that God keeps coming and coming and coming small. Hidden. Quiet. In people who look for justice and love kindness and walk with him.

So God is not like Michael Jordan; he's not like the CEO of some Fortune 500 company. He's like a woman who took some yeast and leavened everything in sight.

Book Note

This is a sermon by James R. Van Tholen, taken from *Where All Hope Lies: Sermons for the Liturgical Year* published by Eerdmans. The book of sermons was published after he died of cancer in January, 2001 at the age of 36. It is an outstanding collection of sermons – a gift.

In the introduction, Cornelius Plantinga writes: "When preaching works well, the result is eventful. People feel pierced, or assured, or blessed. They sense that they are somehow joined to God by this religious event, just as they are in baptism or the Lord's Supper. Indeed, Christians think of a preached and heard sermon as "an audible sacrament," to us a phrase attributed to Augustine....

"Jim Van Tholen didn't preach his doubts; he preached the gospel. But he preached the gospel as a human being, complete with its puzzles, questions, and pain. That's a good deal of what made Jim a believable preacher. Always starting from Scripture, but then drawing as well upon the riches of Flannery O'Connor, Frederick Buechner, Annie Dillard, Kathleen Norris and others, Jim showed us the turns and twist in a serious Christian life. He showed us that God is great in large part because God is good – good to sinners, to questioners, to people who turn their back on God and walk toward the darkness."

I couldn't think of a better way to review this book than to give you a taste of it. It's a rich book; in it, we hear the voice of God addressing us in the voice of a man like us.

– The editor

A Father's Love

Intangible Things
Heidi VanDerSlikke

Heather moved from Toronto to our small town when we were both 11 years old. We country kids thought Heather was so cool, with her urban attitude and sophisticated ideas. For her birthday she invited seven of us to a slumber party. No other social event that year created such a stir in our Grade 6 classroom. I never dreamed my parents might not allow me to attend.

To my father's credit, he seldom ever just said no. Usually he would appeal to my youthful sense of reason. I'll never forget his fatherly wisdom in this case. "There's no job more important to me than being your father," he began. "But sometimes it's hard to know whether I should be a nice dad, or a good dad."

Until that point, I never realized the dilemma existed. He explained that he wasn't comfortable with me spending an entire night in the home of a family he hadn't met, and whom no one in town knew very well. He also saw no merit in a plan which clearly involved the deliberate sleep deprivation of children.

In the end he made a point of introducing himself to Heather's family and visiting them for a cup of coffee. I knew I'd won his permission when he told me, "Don't make a habit of it," his standard line when he wasn't thrilled with my choices, but would let me go ahead anyway.

And what a party it was! Eight pre-teen girls listening to records, dabbling with make-up, scarfing down junk food until we practically vibrated from all the sugar we'd consumed. We whispered and giggled into the wee small hours of the night, until seven of us fell fast asleep.

Not me. I lay there breathing in the lingering odors of popcorn and nail polish, debating whether or not to call my dad to pick me up. Of course I couldn't really do that. I had a point to prove to him, and I would never be able to face my friends again if I left before daylight.

There in the darkness, I began to understand my father's reservations about the whole notion of a slumber party. When he arrived the next morning before any other dad, I was solidly convinced that he was not only a nice dad, but a good dad.

My father died almost 27 years ago, but I think of him often, especially around Fathers' Day. The other day I was writing about the time we learned he had terminal cancer. As I wrote, I remembered the grim days of his illness. My faith was in its infancy at the time. I recalled desperate prayers on my Dad's behalf. I prayed that he would be healed. The answer was no. I prayed that his life would be spared. The answer was no. I prayed that he would come to know Jesus. The answer was no. For years I grappled with the idea that sometimes the most loving answer a father can give his child is no. It was an excruciating journey, progressing from a reluctant, intellectual assent until at last arriving at a heartfelt embrace of my Heavenly Father's sovereign and perfect will.

While sitting at my desk, entrenched in serious thought, focused on painful memories, I was vaguely aware of a persistent tapping at the window. Finally, after a loud thud, I looked up to see a tiny bird peering in at me, as if he could read what was on the computer screen. We made eye-contact and he hopped onto a nearby tree branch. From that perch he sang the most cheer-ful song I've ever heard, his entire body straining out every joyful note. His performance complete, he nodded in my direction and took off.

I returned to my writing with a smile on my face. It occurred to me that this little bird was like a messenger from God, reminding me that he often says no, rarely explains himself, yet never has to choose between being a good Father or a nice Father, because, after all, he's simply the best Father in the universe.

Heidi Vander Slikke lives in Harriston, Ont.

What is it to serve God and to do His will? Nothing else than to show mercy to our neighbor. For it is our neighbor who needs our service; God in heaven needs it not.
... Martin Luther

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Christian Living

Why go to church? 22

To celebrate the liberation of the world

A. A. van Ruler

We have now come to the concluding reflections on our question, Why go to church? Here I don't want to add another answer but glance back over what we've accomplished. Here all the different motives are gathered together into a climax. I want to end it like a symphony with a grand, impressive climax.

Such a climax, however, cannot help but introduce some new sounds; the conclusion becomes a new answer. And the answer that we give here – to celebrate the liberation of the world – is a grand, impressive answer. It's a huge order. But a humbler one will not suffice if we are to sum it all up in one sentence.

The church to be church must have knowledge of the mystery, the hidden things of the world. But the hidden things have been revealed. Or in any case they have been made real. The hidden things have been made real in this world.

The church does not deal in things beyond this visible and tangible reality hidden somewhere in other, imaginary worlds. Nor does it deal with things hidden in the being and council of God. That's where they had their beginning. God conceived of great things in himself and decided to carry them out. And he has done so. In doing so, he has revealed a great deal of himself and all of what he decided in his council.

This is why we can celebrate these hidden things. They are not problems, riddles and puzzles that we must solve and which drive us to distraction. They have been revealed; they have become reality. God poured out his heart.

We can go out for a Sunday stroll in these realities. They are not oppressive to our understanding. They are not a burden to our spirit. They are liberating and comforting.

Who knows the mystery?

What is this mystery that the church knows? According to the apostolic gospel it is the kingdom of God which appeared in Jesus Christ and which was sustained on earth and in the lives of mankind by the Holy Spirit. It is not itself the church. The church is just the place where we learn about it. It is not a wholly different reality that has been added to created reality and which must replace it. The kingdom is . . . the world as it is meant to be. The church in terms of its knowledge of the mystery is, thus, where the essential secret of the world is known. The secret is this: it is destined to be the kingdom of God.

"Women Going to the Woods" by Alfred Sisley (1866). This picture captures something of the sheer "Hereness" and mystery of reality as God's creation

Only the church knows this, because she alone wants to know this mystery. She discovered the acts of God in history and rejoices over them.

But is there no one outside of the church and Christianity who knows something of this mystery? In my opinion, yes. In the western world, to the extent that it has been christianized, that knowledge pervades the culture, society and even the state. They have all been shaped by it to some extent. The level of this Christian influence may have been higher in one era than in another, and sometimes the thermometer has dropped down to freezing. At such times, the Christian influence works unconsciously. That's the kind of era we live in today.

In this respect, the church is more human than the world, for it is open to this knowledge; it wants to know this revealed secret. This desire to know is its very purpose for being.

The church's knowledge is in and through Christ. The kingdom of God appeared in him. It was handed over to him, so that it is no longer purely the kingdom of God, of the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – but it is the kingdom of Christ, of God the Son who was made man. That's how it entered our darkness. The majesty of the triune God took on the form of grace and wrapped itself in the sinful flesh that stood under condemnation.

The kingdom of Christ is therefore the labor of redemption, of liberation. In and through him, the kingdom is the kingdom of grace. Before was the kingdom of nature and after will be the kingdom of glory. Between these two, the original and the ultimate, sin intruded and we were lost. But then grace intervened and brought redemption. This is the mystery, the secret that has been revealed and the knowledge of which is the church's entire reason for being: the world is being liberated!

The world is destined to be the kingdom of God

We are not liberated from the world. That's not what the church is for – to lose the world. That's also not why Christ came – to take us out of the world and return us to our original home. Our original home is the world. This is where we were called into being, formed from a piece of clay scooped out of the earth. We are at home only in this world. We don't belong in another world, in heaven, in eternity, or in God.

That's how it is in the Christian faith. Most other religions are not on good terms with the world. They are suspicious of it. The world seems to them a nightmare and they bemoan it. They vilify it. A Christian cannot do this, for the world is the work of God, it is his creation. It is destined to be the kingdom of God.

Seen from the other side, the world will not be liberated from us either. One way of visualizing redemption would be as the liberation of the whole, of the totality of all things taken as a unity. Redemption would then be the melting of all the separate parts into the whole. And evil would consist in individuality, multiplicity and the boundaries between things. To be freed from evil would mean that all things return to the unity of the all.

From the Christian point of view, it is not that easy to rid yourself of your individuality. It is God who willed you to be yourself and no one or nothing else. You remain yourself for all eternity. That's why we confess the resurrection of the body. The idea that we will always be ourselves can be scary, even terrifying. But as long as we are part of the church, we cannot avoid that idea. The mystery of which the church has knowledge has nothing to do with the idea that we will be liberated from ourselves or the world liberated from us.

We are here forever

This is the content of the apostolic gospel: that we will be redeemed along with the world of all forms of corruption. Must we take this "will be" in an eschatological sense, that is, that it will happen only at the end of time?

Yes, that's one meaning. The gospel doesn't only seek to awaken our hearts to faith and to love but also to hope. We look forward to the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment in which all will be cleansed, and the total glorification of all of reality. As Christians we look forward to all this as the content of our hope.

But redemption cannot possibly be entirely postponed to a future time. The entire present is an anticipation of the future, a reaching forward. History as it is happening now will, on the other side of judgment day, fill the eschaton. If there is no history, there is also no eschaton.

This anticipation, this reaching forward to the ultimate kingdom of God actually begins already at the very beginning, at creation. The fact that there is something rather than nothing is already an anticipation of the eschaton. All reality is in one way or another the kingdom of God. This anticipation is intensified when the positivity of reality is advanced over against the negativity of sin and corruption. This is what happens in Christ. Particularly in his resurrection.

The message of Easter is the most robust way of underlining our most basic, most robust sense of reality. The message regarding creation already teaches us that we are really here. But the message regarding the resurrection teaches us more: that we are really here – forever!

We are able to approach all the rest that we are told about Jesus Christ from his resurrection – his death on the cross (which then becomes his atoning sacrifice), his sacred suffering, his words, deeds and miracles, his unprecedented self-consciousness, his voluntary coming in the flesh as God the Son by being born of the virgin Mary. In all of this, that is, in Christ, in Jesus of Nazareth who is the Christ, the Son of the Living God – in all this the kingdom of God has appeared on earth. In him the kingdom has been established, gained a firm foothold on the earth. It appeared as the kingdom of Christ, that is, in the form of grace.

The Spirit fills history with the kingdom

But we cannot stop with Christ. The kingdom of God did not appear in him like a seagull that touches down momentarily on the water only to rise skyward. Many Christians live as though this were the case and many theologians think that way. The kingdom of God? You want to know where it is? Well, in Christ. In him it came near. As for all the rest, we must wait till his return. That's when all of it will come.

According to this way of thinking, in this in-between time we live in a rarefied, barren space. What is it really that we have now? Our memories of Christ and our expectations. For the rest, we have our selves, our neighbor, the devil, and at most the providential care of God.

As I see it, this theological way

of thinking does not do justice to the witness of the New Testament. To say that the work of Christ was only the work of atonement and that the work of liberation belongs to the eschata, the last things, strikes me as inadequate and pale. Christ not only made atonement for us (in the sense of 1. assuaging God's wrath, 2. covering and washing away our guilt, 3. removing the enmity between God and mankind), he also liberated us.

But in essence it is all exuberant play, sport, like the olympic games. This captures the essential form of Christianity.

To this, add the fact that the New Testament not only knows of Christ; it also knows of the Holy Spirit and his work. He mediates for us the redemption accomplished by Christ and makes it our own. This is to sum up the work of the Holy Spirit in one word – the work of "application." This "mediation" and "application" are such tremendous works, however, that we can also say that it is the Holy Spirit who liberates us. In other words, he continues the kingdom which appeared in Christ. In this way, it remains a reality on earth and in time. The Spirit, as it were, fills the entire historical process with the kingdom.

When the question is posed, "Is the liberation of the world from all forms of corruption an eschatological or a historical reality?" Christians cannot choose. They can only say, "Both!" What happens in history is just as important as what will happen on the last day.

Dancing and delight

Above all to be church and to be a Christian is to celebrate this liberation. There is a passive side to this celebration: we receive it and it happens to us. It is much more true in Christ and in the work of the Holy Spirit than it is in our own lives. Yet, it is true and real there too. It is true and real everywhere. Being is filled to the brim with the Spirit's work of redemption. Its very walls are bulging with it.

This passive side – simply celebrating redeemed being – is the central thing in Christianity. We keep returning to the thought that the world is redeemed and is being redeemed. Again and again we let the realization sweep over us and we are filled with amazement. And each time our joy becomes deeper and stronger. Out of this joy comes our fuel for daily living, and out of it we walk God's paths through this world till we accept both life and death as one in redemption. A playfulness and light-footedness comes into our lives. This sense of life as dance is the celebration of God's liberating work.

In one of the previous meditations I used the image of the sheep grazing in green pastures along quiet waters, where they lay down in contentment. That was in a different context, namely, to talk about the rest we are looking for in the church. Here I want to come back to that image, but here the context is vastly bigger: the liberation of the world. That's very different from taking a breather from the busyness of the world.

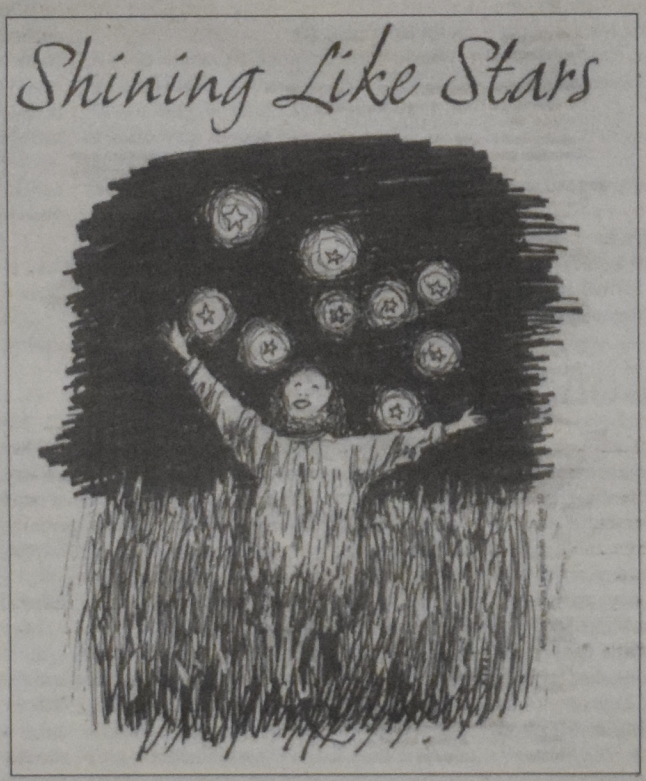
We are part of a flock. All around us are green meadows and beside us flow quiet waters. We settle down and relax into this totally redeemed being and into the totality of being. Here we stretch out full-length in the grass, just to enjoy it all. We doze off and sleep. We dream and soak up the sunshine of God's grace. It is the kingdom of glory in seed form. As I see it, the mystical-ontic rest, the rest of our deepest inwardness at the redemption of the totality of being is the most essential form of Christian existence. There are many other forms as well, and we must not detract from those. Each has its own meaning and value, but the most essential form of Christian existence is this delight at the redemption of the world.

Knights of the kingdom

We are first of all a flock of sheep, not a swarming ant-heap. Some would prefer the church to be the latter nowadays. It must be busy, socially relevant. Above all, it must have practical meaning. All the members must become mobilized. The church must become a business where things are happening (efficiently, please).

I don't want to deny the element of truth in this picture, but the essence of the church is deeper. It is mystical-ontic. It is to be found in the experience, the consciousness, the confession of the redemption of being.

The church isn't just an army going out to battle. We are, it is true, knights of the kingdom, an image I used once before. When we read the law of God, we are knights swearing allegiance to our code of honor. That, too, is a festive occasion. It is a form of celebrating God's redemption. Knights may be mobilized at some time. But they don't go off on their quest right away.



This drawing by Kira Langendoen, a grade 10 student at Beacon CHS in St. Catharines, expresses something of the joy and gratitude and lightness of being the van Ruler celebrates.

First they go to the practice field and, better yet, to tournaments. They play their knightly games, and they play them with all their might. But in essence it is all exuberant play, sport, like the olympic games. This captures the essential form of Christianity.

Freedom and eternity

But we must remind ourselves that it is not just about the redemption of the individual or about many individuals; it is about nothing less than the redemption of the world.

This doesn't mean that all people are saved. There must be room for people to refuse, not just to refuse to join the celebrations but also to refuse to be redeemed. A person cannot be saved against his will. He may not want to be saved. Then he is blind to grace and his heart is hardened. He is rejected [reprobate].

This matter of man's rejection of God and God's rejection of man is dark to our minds. That's a simple observation as obvious as a barn. But it is important to remember that the darkness is indeed dark. That means we can't see through it. There isn't a spark of reason to be found there. We can only speak of it with our face averted.

Nevertheless, although there's nothing rational about it, everything is at stake in this teaching. Redemption must course through the free will of humanity and it must happen freely. The freedom of man corresponds with the freedom of God.

One component of man is this freedom, and another is his temporality. Man in his freedom makes his decision in time, but this decision counts for eternity. The idea that you get another chance to be saved after death is just as demeaning to man as the idea that he is saved even against his will. At issue is the seriousness of his unique existence. He is here once and only once.

But the invitation goes out to everyone. No one is shut out. The gospel of redemption is directed to all people. It is completely universal.

This news isn't as good as it sounds on first hearing. It doesn't mean that salvation is equally present everywhere and for everyone. It is from Israel. It is solely and exclusively through Israel's Messiah. There's no narrower particularism than this: we point to the one name of Jesus Christ.

The universe bathing in the brightness of God's glory

But all people are invited into fellowship in him. This unlimited generosity is something we must celebrate. The gospel is universal in the sense that people from every nation and race come pouring into the kingdom of God. This vision of the joining of all people who confess his name in the family of God is also something to be celebrated.

But there's another side to it, too. Although created reality is saved, not all people are saved. We might say that in the elect the entire human race as such is saved, and that the lost are seen as some branches and leaves that are cut off, while the tree as a whole is saved.

At any rate, we may and must say that the society of mankind, as a part of created reality, is the object of God's redemption. In fact, it seems to be the primary object of redemption: at last – a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness live! This is what the gospel seems to be all about. The kingdom of God coincides with the social ideal.

However, we must not become one-sided in this respect. Nowadays many have become obsessed with the idea of social justice to such a degree that all the rest seems to fade into the background, except perhaps sports. But this doesn't do justice to man. Even if the social ideal is the focal point of the expectations posed by the gospel, there is a lot that comes with it. In our deepest inwardness, we are also reconciled with our selves. The soul and the body, too, are reconciled with one another. And everyone joins his neighbor under his fig tree. The entire historical process is tallied up and all the tears shed are wiped away. History is no longer, in the words of Ernst Troeltsch, a breath on the cold glass of nature, but nature and history are united in harmony like body and soul. Yes, the entire universe bathes in the brightness of God's glory.

All this is included in the redemption of the world. To put it in one sentence: being is no longer a fearful thing. We may feel blessed, happy.

These are a lot of glittering generalizations. Does anyone really believe them? Aren't they almost unbelievable? Nevertheless, this is what the gospel tells us: the Redeemer has come and the world is (being) redeemed.

Make regular respite from caregiving a priority

by Lisa M. Petsche

If you are providing care to a chronically ill family member, you may be aware of the importance of taking a break from caregiving duties and have arrangements in place that allow for this. If not, though, this article is for you.

Although caregiving can be very rewarding, it can also be quite stressful over time, owing to the physical toll of hands-on helping and the emotional strain of dealing with the illness of a loved one, especially if he/she poses behavioral challenges. That's why it's important for caregivers to have respite, ideally on a regular basis.

Health care professionals encourage caregivers to take breaks in order to attend to things on their "to-do" list they've been putting off, but especially to take care of their personal needs and maintain their individuality.

This break time can involve a wide variety of activities, from performing necessary household management tasks, to running errands, to engaging in self-care (catching up on sleep, getting a haircut, attending a support group), to attending worship services, to enjoying some recreation and leisure time (pursuing a hobby, visiting friends, attending a cultural event, taking a vacation).

Benefits

The goal of respite is to refresh caregivers physically, mentally and spiritually, the change of pace – and often environment – renewing their energy and restoring their perspective. When practiced regularly, respite helps keep the stresses of caregiving manageable, preventing burnout – a common phenomenon among caregivers that's manifested by physical health problems or such emotional symptoms as frequent irritation by small annoyances and feeling overwhelmed.

The benefits of respite extend to care recipients as well: they receive a fresh approach to care and perhaps more individualized attention from the alternate caregiver. If respite takes place in the community, it provides a stimulating change of environment and a chance to socialize as well as participate in new or previously enjoyed activities.

In addition, regular breaks can serve to reduce any tension that might exist between caregiver and care recipient because of constant togetherness and, in some cases, personality differences. Respite also expands each person's world, opening them up to new relationships and opportunities and providing interesting topics for conversation when they're together. This serves to enrich the relationship between caregiver and care recipient.

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Care options

In-home respite may be provided by a health care aide employed by a government agency or hired directly by the caregiver through a home health care agency; an individual with or without formal training, hired under a private arrangement (most often located via word of mouth or newspaper classified advertising); a trained volunteer (for example, from the Alzheimer Society); or a relative or friend.

Community-based respite options include caregiver support groups that offer concurrent care; adult day care centres that provide social and recreational programing and often include a mid-day meal; and residential care facilities that have a short-stay program.

Selection factors

Some caregivers are fortunate to have friends or relatives nearby who are able and willing to provide regular or periodic respite. Some of these people may offer to help, while others might need to be asked but are glad to be of assistance. Other caregivers, however, may not have any local relatives, or none who are in a position to help (due to their own health problems or other obligations, for example), and must rely on formal help instead.

The following factors need to be considered when choosing a respite service:

- Type of assistance needed – companionship, supervision, housekeeping, personal care, or medical monitoring and intervention. This will determine the type of caregiver qualifications required.
- Special medical or behavioral needs, communication challenges, or eccentricities of the care recipient.
- Time involved – length and frequency of desired breaks.
- Setting – consider transportation issues as well as the care recipient's energy level, personality (for example, shy versus outgoing) and any preferences he or she might have.
- Cost, including whether a subsidy is available, or if any insurance will cover it. Be aware that many agencies charge a three-hour minimum per visit for homemaking, personal support and companion services.

If you decide to seek private in-home help, arrange to meet with the potential helper in your home after performing a telephone screening. Prepare a list of questions in advance, to help you determine his/her qualifications and suitability, and provide a comprehensive description of your relative's needs and your own expectations. Pay close attention to how the candidate interacts with your relative. Ask for and check references (both educational and employment-related), and consider doing a police check as well.

If you wish to pursue care in an adult day centre or residential care facility, take some tours and talk with staff and clients. Involve your relative in this process as well, if feasible. Otherwise, bring along a family member or friend for a second opinion.

Lisa M. Petsche is a medical social worker and freelance writer.

Marriage works: Leave it alone

By Lorna Dueck

The worst nightmares of marriage were paraded last week, when a Lethbridge couple pulled Canadians on a voyeuristic journey into the annals of "for better or for worse, in sickness and in health."

The ride came at the expense of Dave Heatherington, whose errant wife, Darlene, a city alderwoman and mother of three, said she'd been kidnapped, drugged, taken to Las Vegas and raped. Her story unravelled under police questioning. But Mr. Heatherington stood before a crush of reporters, whose microphones were jabbing into any vestige of the couple's privacy, and told a gawking world his stand on their marriage: "I trust her, I believe in her and I love her."

He stood there a hero, protecting a woman in a broken state and three vulnerable children, a model for belief in the miracle of marriage. No doubt, more than a million prayers went up for the Heatheringtons that day — because believe it or not, Canada has scores of closet Christians who live by the truth that God really cares about marriage, a union that appears repeatedly in the Bible as a word picture for how He works in relationship with people.

Marriage and the church

So you can imagine the enormous grief, as behind closed doors in circles of church leadership, questions are being raised about whether Canada has reached the moment when the church will have to detach itself from its role in civic marriages. The crisis has been caused by the latest ruling in a B.C. court mandating the government to redefine marriage to include gay couples.

If the church reacts by leaving its role in civic marriage, it will be an enormous schism in the spiritual history of our country — a history so real that Bible verses were carved over Parliament's entrances, hospitals were founded on Christian charity, universities were founded on clerical thought, and early immigration policies were informed by the theological views of the Salvation Army. Spiritual conviction shaping public activity is a still-vibrant part of our heritage; for the church to walk away from something as fundamental as performing legally recognized marriages is a profound development.

Marriage and public policy

Marriage will soon hit the headlines again, this time in public policy, as the federal justice committee completes its report. It does so after a 12-city tour where it listened to citizens to determine if the union should be redefined to include same-sex couples. Thousands of Christians would find their religious freedom to believe in the purposes of the Bible compromised with

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Meditation

A Look into Heaven

Every believer, young or old, is intrigued with the question of where Jesus is. For little kids he is, very simply, "up, in heaven." Most of us are not much farther along in answering that question, likely with less satisfaction than our children experience. He is seated at the Father's right hand, but where is that? We have a conviction that he is involved with our life but we settle for the Catechism's answer that "with his godhead, majesty, grace and Spirit he is never absent from us," but his bodily presence is far beyond our knowing or our experience.

Several months ago I wrote: Where is Jesus? which was published in C.C. I confessed to doing a bit of speculating in writing about the place called "heaven," where Jesus is, as the Seventh Dimension. I reasoned that we live in a 3-dimensional world, of height, breadth and depth, plus the fourth dimension which is time, all of which came into being in the original creation event. I said that heaven was created at the same time. Scripture says that God created "the heavens and the earth." That must include heaven where angels dwell and which is the destiny of all who are in Christ.

Heaven as an aspect of the original creation is radically different from what we know of the universe. I see it as having no relationship to our "space," while still being totally real, though completely outside of our ability to experience it. But Paul was allowed to look into it and saw wonders so glorious he could not tell about them. So I see "heaven" as another dimension of creation, and call it the Seventh Dimension.

Now it is in that perfect dimension that Jesus lives, in his perfect human nature. And in that heavenly dimension he, as one of us, has perfect, total access into all of the rest of God's creation, which he sees and rejoices in and weeps for and rules over. Living in that heavenly dimension he is always near to us and to every square inch of this present universe, as man, universalizing his connection with our world.

Resurrection life

From this perspective I would continue to think about resurrection life in the new heaven and earth.

We know from the Scripture that when we die we will go to "be with Jesus" but we will not have bodies till the resurrection. Just what that intermediate state is like we know practically nothing, and I would not dare even to speculate about it. But Scripture assures us that at the resurrection we will have new bodies like the body of Jesus in his resurrection.

That clearly implies that we will experience reality as he does now, and that we will be able to follow Jesus everywhere and live life as he lives it. In the same way as Jesus will live his life in heaven and on the new earth, so we will be able to live. As Jesus will be able to go from heaven to earth and earth to heaven, so will we. Just as Jesus is now not dependent on food and drink in heaven, neither will we. But just as he could eat fish on the shore of the Sea of Galilean, so we should be able to enjoy the good things of the new earth.

Thinking further along these lines, it would seem that just as Jesus in his resurrection is able to enjoy the fullness of God's creation so should we in our resurrection life. We would then have the option to freely roam earth and heaven, to be present anywhere at any time by just wishing to be there, to explore and to enjoy endlessly. That opens up for us a magnificent life in which to fully experience the wonders of God's new creation. There will be no limitations to our access to God's fabulous and redeemed universe — heaven and earth. By simply desiring it, we will be able to be present anywhere at any time. Just like Jesus!

Knowing one another

Just think what this might mean for our curious minds and our creative spirits, to be able to roam the earth and the universe. Without space ships or rockets. What a field day for the scientifically endowed and charged! And for the artist and the musician in all of us. To be so totally free yet so totally involved in the life of heaven and earth! It is mind boggling just to think about it as a potential for life eternal — all in the presence of God and of Jesus his son and our brother.

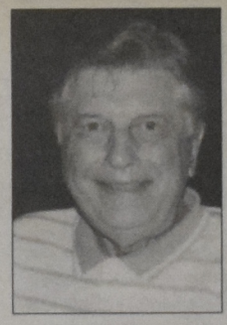
This raises innumerable questions about our relationships in the new creation, none of which we can answer with any degree of certainty. The most frequently asked is whether we will know each other as we did here in this life. It would seem totally logical that, if we "shall know even as we are known," we will not only know each other but we will know everybody. That would imply that we will get to know everyone's story lived in this life, especially as that involved the role played by each one of that mighty throng in the coming of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. I envision, and hope, that we will be able to sit down with the likes of the Apostle Paul and all the saints of the Old and New Testament and the church fathers, and Luther and Calvin, and hear their stories.

That further implies that we will come to know the totality of world history as it played out in the struggle for the kingdom of God. That will be enough to keep us busy for "much" of eternity.

And we would all like to know whether we will connect with family and friends, and relatives, and spouses. I once knew a seminary professor who used to say, I imagine somewhat facetiously, that he couldn't be happy in heaven without his dear wife.

The fact that in the new life there will be no marrying and giving in marriage has not absolutely answered the question of whether we shall be male and female. As a matter of interest, some of the fastest growing religions, like Mormonism and Islam, have as key tenets of their teaching that, in heaven, men will be able to have many wives. That leads one to wonder whether they have discovered the ultimate gimmick for gaining victory in the numbers game being played out all over the world. But I imagine that our fellowship will be so marvelously broad and involved that such special relationships would hinder our ultimate service to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Whatever may or may not be realistic and true of this my speculative view of the Seventh Dimension, one thing is sure. I wouldn't miss out on what's coming for anything this world might provide by way of any temptation. For we haven't seen anything yet! And I feel very sorry for anyone who will miss out on it.



Ty Hofman is a Yankee-Canuck and retired minister of the Christian Reformed Church who lives in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Marriage works...

...continued from page 16

such marriages, and that conflict caused the justice committee to hear more on theology than it likely bargained for. While the committee's conclusions are still under wraps, vice-chair John McKay has warned that "as sure as God made little green apples, gay activists will take clergy to court if they refuse to marry gay couples."

Into this conundrum has walked what may be a prophet for Canada, a devout and aging Christian, Gerald Vandezande. Mr. Vandezande, a retired director of Citizens for Public Justice, received the Order of Canada last year for his work in helping Canadians understand justice. He now finds himself living out his conviction of "justice, not just us," on a basic Christian issue: marriage. His proposal is that the definition of marriage, "the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others," should continue to be protected in law, but that committed, conjugal relationships other than marriage are a reality that should also be reflected in Canadian law.

Marriage and the law

Same-sex unions, common law and who knows what else the government may define as a conjugal relationship would become protected next to marriage under a registry of civil union and public declaration of mutual commitment made before legal witnesses. Any religious affirmation of such ceremonies would be separate, optional rites of blessing that would be protected by religious freedom guarantees in the Charter of Rights. They would not be subject to challenge in court. Priests and pastors would no longer issue any legal certification in their marriage services, dropping the concluding "by the power vested in me" by the government as they pronounce couples husband and wife.

The reality of having to go through two ceremonies to gain both legal recognition and the act of invoking God's blessing on our unions is a staggering setback for a freedom we've enjoyed since before Confederation. But given the realities of court activism, it may be the only way faith communities can stay out of lawsuits over who goes to the altar.

Marriage and ideology

There is a sharp divide shaping up in Christendom on this issue. "This is not about rights, it's about a court-orchestrated coup for the ideological property of marriage," said Darryl Reid, of Focus on the Family, pointing out that economic and family provisions already are equalized for Canada's 34,000 gay couples.

The idea of uniting the provinces on changing the government role in marriage is daunting, and communicating the dilemma across the diverse Canadian faith scene will be monumental.

Only time will tell the consequences of shaking this institution from its security — but Parliament can be assured that more than a million prayers will be going up for marriage and its state in our land.

Lorna Dueck is the Executive Producer and Host of the Thursday edition of 100 Huntley Street's current affairs program Listen Up TV. She is a columnist for the Hamilton Spectator, Christian Week Magazine and guest writer on faith issues with The Globe & Mail, and a frequent public speaker at a wide variety of events.

This article first appeared in the Globe and Mail, Thursday, May 15

Synod

When science becomes involved in making babies

Harry der Nederlanden

The Committee to Examine Life Issues Raised by Bioscience and Genetic Engineering was appointed by the CRC Synod of 1999 to address issues raised by new capacities that have entered our lives through the life sciences. The committee was asked to examine in vitro fertilization, surrogate pregnancy, artificial insemination by donor, birth control methods like the morning-after pill, abortion in cases of rape and fetal deformity, harvesting of fetal tissue and cloning.

That's a tall order for one committee, but, of course, Synod really didn't expect it to study each of these topics in depth. We can only expect to receive from Synod biblical guidelines or a framework to help us make decisions about how these dramatic new powers figure into our lives. The report does go into quite a bit of detail on some of these questions. Although it tries to be sensitive about needlessly binding the consciences of believers, it perhaps goes into more detail than is necessary in some instances.

Some of the more spectacular capabilities of the new science that have featured prominently in the news, such as cloning babies and engineering their looks and intelligence, are so obviously unbiblical that they need little discussion. However, some of the same technology comes into play when infertile couples seek ways to have children. To what lengths may they go to have children that carry their genes? What about couples who know they are carriers of a serious genetic disease that can be passed on to their children: may they use the new science to give birth to children free of the disease?

Many different procedures have been made possible because scientists can now take eggs from a woman and fertilize them in the laboratory, in effect starting a child, an embryo, outside the womb. This has made it possible for many infertile couples to have children of their own. The microscopic embryo is then implanted in the mother's womb to grow to full term. Since success is not guaranteed with a single embryo, a number are begun and then frozen for future attempts. According to a recent *Washington Post* story, US fertility clinics are now holding over 400,000 frozen embryos in storage.

What is the status of an embryo?

Many scientists see such leftover embryos as a gold mine for medical research. Embryos are the best known source for stem cells, cells that can be made to morph into all kinds of cells from skin to liver cells. Hopes are high that such cells will eventually provide a cure for numerous diseases, including Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. To use them for that purpose, however, the embryos must be killed.

One of the big questions that such research raises is, therefore, what is the status of an embryo that has been created outside the womb? Must we treat it like a baby in the womb? Some Christians firmly believe so and are urging people to adopt any leftover frozen embryos to keep them from being used in research or simply destroyed.

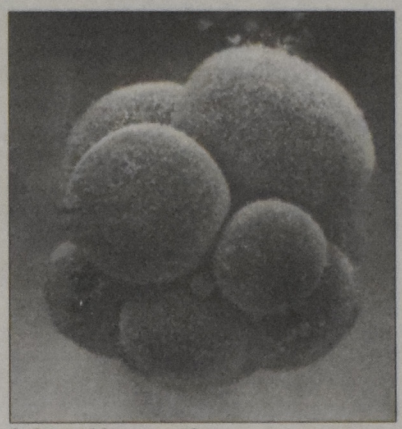
When embryos are created in the lab for parents, before they are implanted in the mother's womb, they can be examined for genetic diseases and abnormalities. Even in natural procreation embryos that have something wrong with them are often sloughed off by the mother's body. May parents who are carriers of serious genetic diseases (some of which are terminal) pick over a store of embryos and have only the good ones implanted leaving the others frozen indefinitely?

The science in this area is moving so rapidly that some of the questions may already have been superceded by the time the report reaches the churches and other new ones raised. A recent report, for example, suggests that baby teeth are a good source of stem cells. If another source can be found for stem cells, this will take off the pressure to make embryos available as a resource for experimentation, but it still leaves us with the question of how to treat "surplus embryos."

Moral protection for all human life

The principle that the authors of the report commend to us is that "Human life at every stage of development warrants moral protection from wanton and arbitrary violence." But they do not take this to mean that the moral protection for a frozen embryo ought to be the same as for an independent person. In support of this variation in protection, the long-standing CRC position on abortion is cited. When childbirth threatens the life of the mother, the CRC has said, abortion is permissible, so we extend greater protection to the mother than to the unborn child.

The authors don't always opt for one position over another.



2-day-old human embryo

There are two views about the moral difference between an implanted embryo and an unimplanted one, they concede, both consistent with the Reformed faith. One is that there is no moral difference. Such a position virtually rules out many new procedures.

However, since the implantation of the embryo is an iffy process even in normal conception, other "thoughtful Christians" hold, there is a definite difference. Not that it no longer merits the respect due to human life, but an unimplanted embryo lacks the wherewithal to develop into a baby on its own, so it does not have the same claims on us. Since using such embryos as a source of stem cells means their deliberate destruction, the report condemns such use.

The committee makes a careful distinction between *causing death* and *allowing to die*. When many embryos are created in the process of starting a baby when natural methods don't work, some of them die in the process. However, this is different than deliberately killing them for research.

"We differentiate between those procedures that have as their goal the creation of human life with the intent to offer that life the environment it needs in order to flourish and those procedures that seek to us the human life as a means to an end without intending to host the life so that it can flourish to its potential," says the report.

Screening embryos

When it comes to screening embryos (examining them for defects before they are implanted), however, to allow those not selected, to die is the same thing as killing them. In other words, the authors say, if in the process of making embryos to implant in the mother's womb, it is discovered that some of the embryos have some defect that will, say, cause the child to die shortly after birth, they ought nevertheless to be treated in the same way as the healthy embryos. The parents may not pass over the defective ones and choose only the healthy ones.

I can understand the principle at work here, but when it comes to a truly horrendous disease (with which one or the other of the parents will probably have had some direct experience) this rule does put an awful burden on the conscience of those faced with this dilemma. How many parents put in this situation will be able to deliberately blind themselves?

There are more such burdens laid on those undergoing infertility procedures. The committee urges such couples to create no more embryos than the number of children they are willing to have. Even if an infertile couple wants but one child, the procedure, as I understand it, requires creating a number of embryos, because there's still a lot of hit-or-miss involved. Does this mean that in order to want one child a couple must begin by wanting to want, say, half a dozen since that's how many eggs will be fertilized? That leaves me scratching my head.

But in a report of this scope, it is always easy to find things to quibble with. All in all, it's a good and readable report that deserves a wide reading and serious discussion.

I conclude by quoting directly six "precepts" that the committee presents to the churches when reflecting on the complex issues posed by genetic engineering.

A. We must not recommend rules that bind the conscience in disputable matters. To do so would violate personal Christian liberty. Instead, we should prescribe only where God's will is clear. Scripture is clear that every human life is created in the image of God and is precious to God. Scripture does not explicitly teach what moral protections the unimplanted human embryo deserves, although it is clear that as a unique human life it warrants significant protection.

B. Because human embryos deserve significant moral protections, creating human embryos in vitro is something that should be done only when every embryo so created will be given an opportunity to implant and develop into a child.

C. It is morally wrong to intentionally cause the death of a human embryo, whether implanted or not, except when it must be done to save the life of the mother.

D. It may not be morally wrong to ingest a morning-after pill in the case of rape due to the complexities of the situation, including the fact that it is often unclear if an embryo has been created as a result of the rape.

E. It is good for married couples to want to have children, and it is a blessing to have children, but there are limits to the lengths to which couples may go in order to have children. Infertility is a disorder in God's design for human procreation, and we may attempt to prevent or correct this but only through morally acceptable means.

F. Procreation should be kept within the context of a male-female, two parent, covenantal relationship of marriage.

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Ontario bouwt ziekenhuizen, autosnelwegen, scholen, universiteiten, wijkcentra en culturele faciliteiten. Elke gemeenschap in Ontario heeft er baat bij.

Ontario en haar partners – gemeentelijke en landelijke regeringen en instituten, zoals ziekenhuizen en universiteiten – hebben sinds 1999 meer dan $15 miljard geïnvesteerd of zijn de verplichting aangegaan, in meer dan 4000 gemeenten en steden in de hele provincie de openbare faciliteiten te verbeteren. Elke gemeenschap wordt hierdoor positief beïnvloed en dit zal het bestaan voor iedereen die hier woont verbeteren.

SuperBuild is de instantie van de regering van Ontario die verantwoordelijk is voor het investeren in deze projecten. Er wordt hulp geboden om de kans te hebben om van het leven te genieten. Deze investeringen zorgen er voor dat onze provincie meer welvarend wordt, zodat er voldoende banen voor iedereen zijn. Onze kinderen en kleinkinderen baten *hier* ook bij, omdat de projecten de publieke service verschaffen, zoals scholen, gezondsheidszorg, en goed vervoer, waardoor er een betere maatschappij voor Ontario komt – voor vandaag en morgen. Deze investeringen bouwen aan de toekomst.

Hoe? Een korte samenvatting van een paar punten die door de investeringen van Ontario's SuperBuild voor een beter bestaan voor iedereen zorgen.

- **Gezondheidszorg**: $4,5 miljard voor het reconstrueren van de gezondheidszorg, zodat het hele gezin snel en gemakkelijk medisch behandeld kan worden. En er komen meer dan 20,000 lange-termijn bedden bij voor de ouderen onder ons – de eerste grote uitbreiding in meer dan 15 jaar.

- **Onderwijs**: Een $2,6 miljard investering om te verzekeren dat iedereen de kans krijgt naar vakschool of universiteit in Ontario te gaan, zodat uw zonen en dochters de opleiding krijgen die ze verdienen.

- **Vervoer**: Ontario en haar partners maken plannen om in de komende 10 jaar $10 miljard te investeren in autosnelwegen en $9 miljard in openbaar vervoer, zodat u snel op uw plaats van bestemming kunt zijn en onze produkten makkelijker op de markt komen. Beter vervoer maakt een sterkere gemeenschap en zorgt voor meer banen.

- **Wetenschappelijk onderzoek**: Meer dan $39 miljoen om bio-technologische instellingen op te richten. Dit leidt er toe dat wetenschappelijke ontdekkingen medicijnen van de toekomst worden en het zet bedrijven op, die de economie ver in de toekomst zullen stimuleren.

- **Het maken van sterke gemeenschappen**: Ontario en haar partners investeren $2.9 miljard om meer buurtwijken te bouwen, recreatie faciliteiten te verbeteren en de culturele instituten te ondersteunen die ons leven verrijken.

Dit zijn een paar punten die er door de investeringen van Ontario's SuperBuild voor zorgen dat ons bestaan verbetert en dat er een betere toekomst komt voor onze kinderen. Er zijn er nog veel meer.

U kunt complete bijzonderheden over deze en duizenden andere projecten bekijken op de website van SuperBuild: www.SuperBuild.ca.

Of u kunt 1-800-263-7965 bellen, of schrijven naar 7 Queen's Park Cr., Toronto ON, M7A 1Y7, en vragen om een kopie van het 2003 SuperBuild Progress Report, dat wij u dan zullen toesturen.

Ook kunt u een oogje open houden voor een SuperBuild reklamebord. Deze zijn te vinden op de duizenden plaatsen waar de regering van Ontario laat zien hoe ons bestaan wordt verbeterd door de investeringen van SuperBuild.

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Personals

Are you a Christian gentleman looking for a relationship with a fun-loving, family oriented woman? I am a 44-year-old divorced (for 9 years) mom of three kids ages 17, 19 & 21. I'm looking for someone to share a new phase in life now that the kids are getting older. If you are a sincere, trustworthy and loving man who would enjoy spending time getting to know someone new for potential relationship please contact: **File 2738,** 1 Hiscott St. St Catharines ON L2R 1C7

Anniversaries

1953 June 6 2003

With thanks to God
for His steadfast love and faithfulness,
we rejoice and celebrate with our parents:

JOHN AND MARGARET VANDER HOUT
on the occasion of their
50th Wedding Anniversary

Open House to be held
Saturday June 14th, 2003
from 2-4 p.m. at the Burlington, Christian Reformed Church.

Best wishes only, please.

With Love:
Annetta & Darrell, *Ancaster*
Clarence & Joanne, *St. Ann's*
Edward & Donna, *Flamborough*
Maurice & Lucy, *Burlington*
Martin & Barb, *Burlington*
and 11 grandchildren

Mailing Address: 312 - 2010 Cleaver Ave
Burlington ON L7M 4C1

Anniversaries

1953 June 3 2003

"One thing I ask of the Lord,
this is what I seek: that I may dwell
in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life." Psalm 27:4

With praise and thanksgiving to God,
we joyfully announce the
50th Wedding Anniversary of

CORNELIS AND JOHANNA TIMMERMAN
(nee Scholten)
We pray that God will continue
to bless them in the years to come.

With love, from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren:
John & Yvonne Timmerman, *Alma*
Lori, Karen, Mark & Jennifer (fiance), Carla (), Bryan
Harry & Joan Timmerman, *St. George*
Jennifer & Randall Koops
(Devin, Dylan, Jordan),
Stephanie & Jeff Rodrigue,
Ashley, Jaclyn
Grace & Erwin Raaber, *Pickering*
Christopher
Jean & Paul Koornneef, *Winona*
Jolene, Daniel, Jestina
Ron & Shirley Timmerman, *Arthur*
Alicia, Derek
Marilyn & Bert Hogeveen, *Caistor Centre*
Amber, Chad, Jazmine

You are invited to share our joy at an **Open House** to be held at Smithville Covenant Christian School on Saturday, June 14, 2003 D.V. from 7 - 8 p.m.
Best wishes only please.
Home Address:
RR #1 Caistor Centre ON L0R 1E0

NICK AND BETTY ANEMA (nee Visser)

God our Father blessed them with marriage on June 24th,
It has been fifty years since then. He continues to shine his love on them.
Join us in recognizing this joyful occasion of their
50th Anniversary with an **Open House**
on June 28th, 2003 from 2:00 p.m. till 4:00 p.m. to be held in their backyard at 956 Norfolk St. N. Simcoe ON. (Behind the Garage)

Stan & Valerie Anema
Lindsay, Nicolaas
Ray & Lisa Anema
Gabrielle, Brandon, Christopher
Francine & Rick Ouwendyk
Ashley, Bryan
Roger & Annalea Anema
Jade, Sydney

Mailing Address:
976 Norfolk St N
Simcoe ON N3Y 3R8

Nick & Betty Anema

1948 June 18 2003

"The Lord is our refuge and our strength, our God, in whom we trust."

With thanks to God
for His great faithfulness and love,
we rejoice and celebrate
55 years of marriage with our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents:

JOHN AND CLASINA KUIPERY

Their children:
Dick & Arlene Kuipery, *St.Catharines*
Martha & Pierre Sjaarda, *St. Ann's*
Alice & Ian Brennan, *St. John, NB*
Joe & Marg Kuipery, *Rockway*
Arthur & Tina Kuipery, *St. Catharines*
John & Anita Kuipery, *St. Catharines*
Yolanda & Paul Epp, *St. Catharines*
Eric & Judy Kuipery, *St. Catharines*
Phil & Cathie Kuipery, *St.Catharines*
Rob & Suzan Kuipery, *St. Catharines*
Sylvia Kuipery, *St. Catharines*
37 grandchildren & 5 great-grandchildren

Home Address: 15 Sherman Drive
St. Catharines ON L2N 2K9

1953 July 25 2003

"In his heart, a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps."
Proverbs 16:9

With thanks to God we announce the
50th Wedding Anniversary
of our parents

ENNO AND LENIE MEIJERS
(nee Roorda)

Love from your children:
Helena & Henk Top
Vroomshoop, The Netherlands
Millie & Ton, Evelien & Daniel
Hinke & Kees (deceased) DeRuyter
Ede, The Netherlands
Jeroen & Jacqueline, Jeffrey, Willem
Gloria & Calvin Van Eek, *Kitchener ON*
Andrew, Helena, Ellen
Corinna & John Bateman, *Victoria BC*
Enno Jan and Ruby (Gietema), *Barrie*
Henk, Simon, Hannah, David, James
Phyllis & Jeff Alberts, *Barrie ON*
Paul, Lenie

Join us in an **Open House** celebration
Saturday July 26, 2 - 4 p.m. (D.V.)
at Tollendale Village
271 Tollendal Mill Rd. Barrie ON

Home Address: G02 Tollendal Mill Rd.
Barrie ON L4N 7S6

By God's grace we are celebrating our
50th Wedding Anniversary
on June 19, 2003.
We'll remember this special day in a service of music and song on Saturday, June 21, 2003 at 1:30 p.m. in the Clinton Christian Reformed Church.
Guest organist will be Kees Amsing from The Netherlands.
Reception in the Church Hall immediately following the service.

GEORGE AND ELIZABETH HIEMSTRA

Children: Stephen & Linda Hiemstra, Peter & Wilma Hiemstra, & grandchildren
Home Address: 218 Ontario St. Box 792
Clinton ON N0M 1L0

BETSY AND HENK HEERSINK
(nee Klomps)

1953 June 17 2003
Aalten Grimsby

Psalm 121
Together we praise the Lord and give thanks, as we celebrate with our parents and grandparents, their
50th Wedding Anniversary.
It is our prayer that the Lord may continue to bless and keep them in the years to come.

Congratulations, from your children and grandchildren.
Home address:
404 - 275 Main St E
Grimsby ON L3M 5N8

Kampen Brockville
The Netherlands Ontario
1930 June 5th 2003

"...Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." Ephesians 4:16

With thankfulness to the Lord,
we share in the joy of our parents

HERMAN AND GRIETJE WESTENDORP
(nee Ijzerman)
as they hope to celebrate their
73rd Wedding Anniversary.
May the Lord continue to bless and guide you as you put your trust in him.

"The Lord is thy keeper,
the Lord is thy shade
upon thy right hand."
Psalm 125:5

Congratulations Dad and Mom,
Opa and Oma, great-grandparents.

The children will have an
Open House for their parents on
June 7, 2003 from 2:30 to 5:00 p.m.
at the Fellowship Hall of
Bethel Christian Reformed Church,
117 Windsor Drive, Brockville, Ontario
All friends are heartily welcome.
Best wishes only!
Home Address:
RR 4 Brockville ON K6V 5T4

1953 **JOHN AND RITA PRINSEN (nee Veldhuizen)** 2003

With thankfulness to God we hope to celebrate our parents
50th Wedding Anniversary. We praise God for his faithfulness.

Bert & Helen Prinsen
John, Brian

Rev. Bill & Grace Hoogland
Dave & Karen VanderPloeg
Isaac, Derek Hoogland

Open House Sunday, June 22
2 - 4 p.m. at 4795 Kalar Rd, Niagara Falls ON L2H 1S7. *Best Wishes Only*

Classifieds

Obituaries

Dedemsvaart O.V. Grimsby, ON
July 5, 1908 May 17, 2003

Psalm 46

The Lord took home peacefully

ALICE (AALTJE) OEGEMA
(nee Drenth)

in her 95th year. Beloved wife of the late Sikko Oegema (1974)
Beloved mother of
Joyce & Ron DeJong, *St. Thomas ON*
Heiko & Helen Oegema, *Talbotville ON*
Ann & Chris Vanderveen, *Brantford ON*
Tom & Maria Oegema, *Talbotville ON*
Henry Oegema, *Abbotsford AB*
Hans & Dorothy Oegema, *London ON*
Ada Oegema, *Victoria BC*
Dear grandmother of 18 grandchildren, and 18 great-grandchildren

The funeral was held at First C.R.C. St. Thomas, Ont. on May 21, 2003.
Correspondence address: Heiko Oegema 10906 Sunset RD, Talbotville ON N0L 2K0

August 17, 1932 April 25, 2003
Schettens (Fr) Oshawa ON

Entered suddenly into her heavenly home with the Lord while at Lakeridge Health Oshawa

BOUKJE ANNA VANDERMEER
(nee Piersma)

Beloved wife of Douwe Vandermeer for nearly 46 years.
Loving Mother and Beppe of:
Harold & Agnes Vandermeer, *Kippen ON*
Alison, Kristin, Karen, Robyn.
Arnold & Rhonda Vandermeer
Bowmanville ON
Joshua and Heather.
Marilyn & Shane Caravan, *Toronto ON*
Dear Sister of:
Hinke & (the late Murk) Falkena
The Netherlands
Sipke Piersma, *The Netherlands*
(The late Barbara) & Lloyd Wesselius
Whitby ON
Doetje & Willem Elgersma,
The Netherlands
Walter & Rose Piersma, *Bowmanville ON*
Durk & Irene Piersma, *Beamsville ON*
(The late Gerritje) & Jaap Boltje
The Netherlands
Lovingly remembered by the Vandermeer Family.
Correspondence Address: D. Vandermeer 3523 Townline Rd N, Oshawa ON L1H 8L7

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." PSALM 23:6

On Sunday morning, May 18, 2003

DINIE HOGEVEEN
(nee Pennings)

dear wife of Andy Hogeveen for 49 years, received the fulness of life at the age of 68 years. Although we mom our loss, we rejoice in her victory.
Dear sister of:
the late Christine & John Lammers
Miriam Lammers
Henry Pennings
Bert & Thea Pennings
Bill Pennings
Grace & John Smith
Gary & Connie Pennings
Willy & John Paul
Henny & Case Bruulsema
John & Virginia Pennings

Psalm 119:50

Address: Andy Hogeveen RR 4
Simcoe ON H3Y 4K3

Peacefully on May 21, 2003 at Faith Manor at H.C.H. it pleased the Lord to take Home our dearly loved Mom, Grandma and Great-grandma

FENNA ROMKJE GROEN
(nee Bogert)

in her 89th year. Mom was preceded in death by our Dad, Johannes Groen in Dec. 58, and 2 sons, Sept. 52 & Jan. 58.
Survived by her children:
Allan & Barbara Groen, *Montreal*
Rose & Ed Rusticus, *Peterborough*
Peter & Barbara Groen, *Windsor*
Keith & Wyn Groen, *Chatham*
Jim & Linda Groen, *Toronto*
Anne Jan & Zusana Groen, *Oshawa*
Yvonne & Peter Ages, *Edmonton*
Loved by 23 grandchildren & 39 great-grandchildren.

Rev. 13:14

Throughout her life Mom was a shining example of hope, love and trust in her risen Lord and Savior.
A memorial service was held at Heritage Hall at H.C.H. on Sat. May 24, with interment at Bowmanville, Ont.
Correspondence address:
Rose Rusticus, 1470 Fair Ave
Peterborough ON K9K 1H2

The Lord took home peacefully in her sleep on May 3, 2003

PATRICIA (PIETJE) WENDEL
(nee Van Hoorn)

Beloved husband for 55 years of:
Charlie (Tunnis) Wendel

Beloved mother of:
Janette & Klaas Hoekstra, *Lemmer*
Joanne & Hans Broekhuisen, *Veldhoven*
Charlie & Mary Ann Wendel, *Wellandport*
Margaret & John Bakkeren, *Brampton*

Dear grandmother & great-grandmother of:
Petra (Harm), Tim, Matijs and Mayke, Natasha & Gerard (Gea), John, Karl, Susannne, Sander, Linda, Timothy, Elizabeth, Jaclyn & Jeff (Jacob), Christopher, Pieter

Dear Sister of:
Janna & Kees† van der Velde-vanHoorn
Brampton
Grietje† & Geert van Wieren-vanHoorn
Drachten
Mientje & Tamme† Storteboom-vanHoorn
Grootegast
Wietske & Siete de Jong-van Hoorn
Grootegast
Hendrik† & Siepie van Hoorn-Veen
Marum
Marten & Ann van Hoorn-Vlaar
Smithville
Aafke & Ale Klaver-van Hoorn
Grootegast
Geeske van Hoorn†

Dear Sister-in-law of:
Lammert & Ali Wendel-Veninga, *Roden*
Bertus & Tiny Wendel-Koenes, *Leek*

And all the nieces and nephews in Canada and in the Netherlands.

A memorial service was held at Holland Christian Homes in Brampton on Tuesday May 6th, 2003 at 2:30 p.m., Rev. H. Praamsma officiating.

Death is not the end, it is only the passing from time into eternity for the Child of God.

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Events

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for
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Please join us on Thursday, **June 19, 2003**
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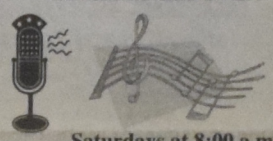
from 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.
A memory book will be made available for your contributions.
For more information, please call (905) 388-2645 or email audreybenjamins@sympatico.ca
If unable to attend, please send greetings by June 17 to audreybenjamins@sympatico.ca or FAX: (905) 388-2769

John Knox Christian School in **Fruitland** announces the retirement of
Jan Bernhardt
after 25 years of teaching service (18 years at JKCS).
Please forward any fond memories, letter of thanks, or notes of best wishes to
54 Callie Road, Hamilton, ON L9A 2A1.

ZINGEND GELOVEN



Saturdays at 8:00 a.m.
AM 1320 & AM 710
P.O. Box 274 West Hill, ON M1E 4R5

HERITAGE SUNDAY

(Hollandse Dienst)
Sunday
June 29 at 3 p.m.
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Oshawa, Ont.

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Rev. John Veenstra
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Rev. Dirk Habermehl

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John Knox Christian School needs a **part-time teacher** for the intermediate grades beginning in September. Please contact us if you are keen to challenge students to excel, enjoy being part of an encouraging staff and appreciate working with a supportive school community. Send your resume, statement of fatih, summary of experience and educational philosophy to:

Mr. Ymko Boersma, Principal
John Knox Christian School
Box 81 4738 Confederation Line
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email: yboersma@ebtech.net

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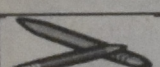

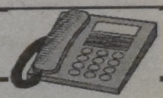

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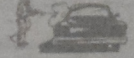

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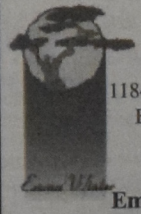

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Items appearing in this column are run free of charge if they advertise an admission-free event, if they accompany an ad for the same event, or at the discretion of CC. In case of free listing, space limitations apply. The charge otherwise is $7.50 per line, or $1.50 per 1/3 line, per insertion

June 8	A **dutch service** will be held in the **Ancaster** Chr Ref church 3 p.m. Rev. John Hellinga preaching.
June 11	**HOLLANDSE DAG** First CRC **Kingston** Ont. 10 a.m. Spreker: Bert Hielema *"Rust in een tijd van onrust"* For more information, call: 613-546-5615
June 11	**HOLLANDSE DAG** 10 o'clock **Moorfield** Community Center. Samenzang, voordrachten, speciale muziek. For information, call H. Rumph at 519-638-2053
June 21, 22	Rehoboth Fellowship Christian Reformed Church, **Etobicoke**, Ont., 50th Anniversary. All invited to an open house on Sat. 2-5 p.m. and special service Sunday at 10 a.m. See ad this issue.
June 28, 29	All Nations CRC, **Halifax,** hosts 50th Anniversary celebration. In conjunction with Pier 21 75th celebrations. Pancake Brunch, Sat. & Sunday worship celebration. Call 902-429-7136 or visit www. allnationscrc.org See ad in May 26 issue.
June 29	**Heritage Sunday** (Hollandse Dienst) 3 p.m. at the Zion CRC, 409 Adelaide Ave.E. **Oshawa**, Ont. Rev. John Veenstra, preaching, Rev. Dirk Habermehl, organist.
July 1	**Frisian Picnic** starting at 11 a.m. at Pinehurst Conservation Park, **Paris**, Ontario. (Hwy 24A -4 miles north of Paris.
July 7	**London, ON** The Royal Canadian College of Organists (London Centre) presents **Jonathan Oldengarm** in concert. Trinity Lutheran Church, 146 Colborne St., 8:00 PM. Information:519-432-4832.
July 12	**Wieringermeerdag** 10 a.m. in **Stratford** on Queens Park Drive. Potluck lunch. Phone 519-631-6234 for more information.
Oct 10 -14	The **Transcona** CRC (Winnipeg, Manitoba) will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary with praise, thanksgiving & fellowship. For info call: Bev Steendam at 204-853-2150 or jsteenda@mts.net
Dec 5, 6,7	**Bethel** CRC **of Lacombe, Alberta**, 50th anniversary - weekend of praise, thanksgiving and fellowship All former and present members and friends are invited. For info, call: Eleanor Wildeboer at 403-782-2602 or e-mail wilelwildeboer@aol.com (See ad Mar 17 issue)

Tollendale Village

A Christian Retirement Community located in Barrie, Ontario

Reservations for Apartments are now being accepted for Occupancy in summer 2004

Tollendale Village is a planned Interdenominational Christian Retirement Community located on 14 acres of prime residential land adjacent to an extensive City Owned natural park and close to numerous other recreational facilities, including the waterfront. Phase 1 and 2, consisting of a total of 20 semi-detached homes and 132 one and two bedroom apartments were completed in 2000 and 2002 respectively and are fully occupied. We are currently constructing our next Phase consisting of another 132 apartments and our Village Square. The Village Square will house a 450 seat chapel, 100 seat Dining room, a convenience store and many other amenities. Also being constructed is an addition to our underground parking garage. Construction started in October 2002 and is expected to be completed in the summer of 2004. We are currently about 70 % reserved, and there are still a large variety of apartments available.

For more information please visit our comprehensive Website at

www.tollendalevillage.ca

or call us at our office at

705-722-0469 (8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Mon - Fri)

WIERINGERMEERDAG

July 12 10 a.m. Potluck Lunch
Stratford
Queens Park Drive
Phone 519-631-6234

THE LIVING WORD

Sermons for reading services

Contact:
R. VanderPloeg
Secr./Treas.
37 Brick Pond Lane
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July 7, 2003. **London, ON** The Royal Canadian College of Organists (London Centre) presents **Jonathan Oldengarm** in concert. Trinity Lutheran Church, 146 Colborne St., 8:00 PM.

Information:519-432-4832.

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Rehoboth, which began as the Annette CRC on January 1, 1953 was joined in 1989 by the Fellowship CRC to become Rehoboth Fellowship.
We invite all members, former members, pastors and friends to join us for an open house to celebrate God's faithfulness to us on Saturday **June 21, 2003** from 2:00 to 5:00 pm and a service of celebration on Sunday **June 22** at 10:00 am. Please feel free to call us for additional information at ***416-622-9647***

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Hollandse Dag - June 11
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Speker: Bert Hielema
"Rust in een tijd van onrust"
For more information, call: 613-546-5615

FRISIAN PICNIC

Tuesday,
July 1, 2002
Starting at 11 a.m.
at Pinehurst Conservation Park, **Paris**, Ontario
on Highway 24A (4 miles north of Paris)
Anyone wishing to join the **band** at the picnic please phone Hindrik DeJong
905-774-7292

Visual Bible Wraps Shooting in Toronto – The Word Becomes Film

By Patricia L. Paddey

The actors wore long robes with beards and hair to match. Their characters' names, (neatly stencilled on cardboard signs, taped to individual dressing room doors) identified them; Simon Peter, James the Less, Judas Iscariot, John.

Outside Toronto Film Studios, the men, nearing the end of a busy day, were taking a break from their labors. Some laughed and chatted. One talked on his cell phone. Another had a cigarette. Their activities seemed strangely incongruous, given their Biblical attire.

Jesus, also known as British actor Henry Ian Cusick, was inside his dressing room. His door was notable for the absence of a cardboard star. It had fallen off, apparently. But everyone knew both who he was and whom he portrayed. His colleagues on the set called him, affectionately, 'J.C.'

The movie being filmed inside the huge green warehouse on Toronto's Commissioners Street was The Gospel of John, Visual Bible International's third production and first feature film planned for exclusive theatrical release.

Henry Ian Cusick appears as Jesus in the Visual Bible production "The Gospel of John."

Word-for-word adaptations

Visual Bible creates films from word-for-word adaptations of books of the Bible. The Gospel of John is based on a word-for-word adaptation of the Gospel by the same name, from the American Bible Society's Good News Bible.

Headquartered in Toronto, Visual Bible bills itself as a "faith based media company". The firm has previously produced films for the home viewing market based on the Gospel of Matthew and the book of Acts.

Having completed two months of filming on this latest production, (one month on location shooting exteriors in the south of Spain, another month at Canada's biggest film and television studio complex), the movie is now in the post-production phase of development. Post-production will continue in Canada as well as in Britain.

This is the first film Visual Bible has tackled since they underwent a complete reorganization last June; a reorganization that included refinancing as well as the appointment of an all new board, management and advisory team.

The new team is clearly determined to do things right. Stunning sets, authentic to first century Judea, 75 principal actors (all exquisitely costumed), 2,000 extras, countless crew members and an original musical score with instrumental sounds of the period are all testimony to the fact this will be Visual Bible's most expensive production to date.

A recent corporate news release indicates the budget is approximately $17 million CDN. Company spokespeople describe it in movie-making terms as "big". It would have to be. They've hired big talent to put it all together.

Veteran producer and six-time Academy Award nominee, Joel B. Michaels, is executive producer. Philip Saville brings 35 years experience to the director's chair. David Lee (who recently won an Oscar for his sound work on Chicago) is the sound editor. Costumer Deborah Hanson can site costumer for the Stratford Festival on her resume.

And impresario extraordinaire, Garth Drabinsky, is creative consultant. Well-known for his meticulous attention to detail and ability to pull off breathtaking theatrical extravaganzas, (Phantom of the Opera, Ragtime, Show Boat); Drabinsky's influence permeated the set.

In addition to the contributions of the production personnel, there was another influence that could be felt on set; that was the influence of the advisory committee. Visual Bible has assembled an impressive team of internationally renowned biblical and theological scholars to act as advisors to the creative and production team.

Peter Richardson is professor emeritus in Christian origins, in the department of religious studies at the University of Toronto. He chairs the advisory committee and says he and the other committee members were brought together for planning meetings every six-to-eight weeks throughout the pre-production period.

"The most satisfying part of the way in which things have proceeded over the past year," Richardson reflected, "is that at the meetings of the advisory committee, they also flew in all the key members of the creative team. When the advisory committee met and had its discussions, the creative people were sitting right there at the same table.

"So it was a conversation between the scholars on the one hand, and the creative people on the other hand," he added. "I think you'd be hard put to find other examples of films, especially films related to biblical material where the same thing has been true."

Hard put indeed. Co-operation between the two elements was instrumental in defining the project's earliest creative options. Richardson says that after selecting John's Gospel as the book on which to base the next production, one of their first decisions was which translation of the Bible to use for the word-for-word adaptation.

"At that point, Garth Drabinsky challenged us in a very interesting way," Richardson remembered. "We were challenged to read through the gospel of John in the two relevant translations, the Good News Bible and the New International Version, and ask ourselves one question; 'Which translation has the most dramatic potential?'

"Uniformly, everybody came back and said the Good News Bible", he said.

Richardson described the relationship between the film's production and advisory teams as "a very happy partnership".

"I think [the Advisory Team] really kept the creative peoples' fingers to the fire on the questions of accuracy, authenticity, integrity and so on," said Richardson. "I think we have acted as both an encouragement, and as a kind of sober group that insists they get it right with respect to all sorts of issues; from the largest, most general issues such as scenery or dress, right down to the detail issues like the size of the stones in the temple," he added.

Richardson said moviegoers will leave the theatre with an extremely accurate impression of life in the time of Christ. "I really think that [the creative and production team] have caught the atmosphere better than I would ever have dreamed that they could do it," he commented.

"It's getting the daily life right as the setting for the story that's being told, that will make it live the best in people's reactions to it."

It goes without saying that Visual Bible is hoping those reactions will warrant all their time, expense and creative efforts. The publicly owned company is, after all, not producing the films for sentimental purposes, but for business ones. "If the first [film] isn't a success," stated Richardson, "there won't be a second one. It's just got to be done well. And it's got to be marketed in such a way that there will be a return on it, that will permit us to do more."

The Gospel of John is due to be delivered

Patricia Paddey is a freelance writer who lives with her husband and three children in Mississauga, Ontario.

News Digest

Norwegian priest offers free weddings to attract couples to the altar

By Lars Grip

Stockholm (ENI) — A Lutheran priest in Norway is offering free weddings to encourage couples to tie the nuptial knot.

The priest, Jarle Veland, in Fyllingsdalen in southern Norway, believes many couples who are living together hesitate to get married because of the cost of the big day.

The priest has persuaded local businesses to offer the couples free flowers, wedding receptions, photographs, and hairdressing, among other items for the special day.

Veland originally scheduled only one day – 24 May – of free weddings. But with 23 couples already signed up, the demand has been so great there will be three days of free weddings in May, and Veland has had to ask his colleagues for their help to take the ceremonies.

The priest said he wants to offer a positive incitement to couples to get married instead of moralizing about those who just live together.

Church blows up for the convenience of worshipers

By Cedric Pulford

London (ENI) – If you can't get people to come to church you can take the church to the people, believes Michael Gill, a British events organizer, who sees his inflatable church as a fun way to draw worshipers.

The air-filled structure is made of fire-retardant PVC, and its steeple stretches to 14 metres. It has "stained glass" windows and even an inflatable altar.

"Traditional church buildings don't compel us to come in. They simply say, You know where the church is if you want to come," Gill told ENI. "The inflatable church is in-your-face. It says, Get involved!"

Gill sees the inflatable church as an answer to falling religious attendance in the United Kingdom and other countries. It could be carried around and used for impromptu services anywhere, from town squares to municipal housing estates.

Gill, aged 34 and a father of two, is especially concerned that traditional churches are ceasing to be part of children's lives, and sees his design as a way to put this right.

"It will be a pied piper for children," he said. "They will think it's a bouncy castle, although in fact it's a rigid structure. It will be an opportunity, however, to combine religion with fun activities."

Gill said the church can be assembled in three hours and dismantled in less than two. Gill says he has received many inquiries from clergy, particularly in the United States and Britain.